

Rebuilding the Common at the Border of the Nation:
The Politics of *Sans Papiers* in Marseille

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Cultural Anthropology
in the Graduate School of Duke University
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My dissertation traces undocumented migrants' experiences at the edge of Europe, as well as their struggles to emerge from the spatio-temporal void to which they are being increasingly confined. By providing an ethnographic account of *sans papiers* who live, work, and organize politically in Marseille, I show how undocumented men and women in the border-city are being dislocated, depersonalized and devalued, and then account for the practices by which they seek to reconfigure the political community that refuses to see and hear them. In so doing, I elucidate the production and experience of exile in a city increasingly transformed by urban enclosure and the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders. I investigate moreover *sans papiers*' capacity to rupture, through a series of political actions, the naturalized space-time of the neoliberal security state.

In my exploration of the *sans papiers* predicament, I deploy a dialectical political economy framework supplemented with a Badiouian reading of political subjectivation. I examine how migrant 'illegality' is produced at the juncture between capital and the state, and assign centrality to space and time as key (mediating) categories of migrant experience. In turn, I construe the political subjectivation of *sans papiers* as a negating gesture grounded, not in the desire for free circulation, but in the experience of radical lack. In so doing, I critically engage the most recent literature on irregular migration, as well as ongoing debates surrounding the common's enclosure and the contradictions of citizenship in the neoliberal moment.

My dissertation is organized around the following three questions: 1) How have recent transformations in Marseille's urban landscape and the European

immigration regime reconstituted the space-time of undocumented migrants in the cosmopolitan port-city? 2) What novel subjectivities are emerging out of these processes? 3) How can *sans papiers* rebuild, if at all, the common at the border of a nation predicated on their simultaneous exclusion and exploitation? In answering these questions, my dissertation follows the experiential trajectory of migrants in Marseille from a (heterotopic) ‘off-place’ to the ‘void of exile’—a shift produced by the neoliberal reorganization of labor and the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders in Europe. It also traces the formation of a ‘generic class’ of overexploited workers who, in spite of contributing to building the new ‘global Marseille,’ are deprived of the right to have rights, of any social visibility, and indeed of any future to speak of.

My dissertation argues that, in the moment they emerge from the void and onto the political scene, *sans papiers* dissolve (if only momentarily) the walls that keep them locked within a regime of invisibility/hypervisibility. They interrupt, moreover, the logic of circulation and accumulation that is driving the enclosure of Marseille’s spatio-temporal common. Thus they point to the possibility of building—in a universalizing gesture—a radically different world: beyond papers, beyond value and towards radical equality.

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PREFACE

I began my fieldwork in 2009 with the goal of researching practices of *métissage* (hybridity) in the port-city of Marseille. My aim, at the time, was to explore if and how interracial and intercultural encounters in this impoverished border-town might disrupt and re-figure prevailing constructions of Frenchness and Otherness in the postcolonial era. In addition, I sought to evaluate whether such practices might counter the violent dislocations produced by the ongoing reinforcement of (supra)national borders at Europe's southern edge. During my first months of fieldwork, I began recording the interactions between impoverished Marseillais of various origins I could observe daily in the urban center. Such mingling of undesirable bodies proved interesting in that it seemed to constitute a sort of cosmopolitanism from below that was generative of unforeseen identities, socialities, and political solidarities at the confines of an increasingly exclusionary fortress Europe.

As I pursued my research into practices of *métissage*, however, I realized that several of the women and men I spoke with were undocumented, and that the lack of a legal status significantly limited their ability to form lasting relationships with long-term residents of the city. The precarity of their situation made it difficult for these migrants to envision a future with others beyond day-to-day survival. Distrust seemed to pervade all relations across the legal divide, so much so that regularized migrants themselves often tried to keep undocumented ones at bay. Moreover, when couples did manage to form between a French citizen and a *sans papiers*, they were met with suspicion by almost every person and institution that came their way—a pressure which caused many of these couples to break apart. All

of this led me to wonder: What impact does political invisibility have on one's sense of social belonging? How can one form attachments with 'state-sanctioned subjects' when one's existence is legally denied? What political possibilities are left to those who in-exist in the broader community? With these questions in mind, I began probing into *sans papiers*' peculiar modes of (non)sociality, as well as into how they themselves envisioned their precarious existence in Marseille, in Europe, and in the social world more generally. Little by little, it was the *sans papiers* condition itself, and not practices of *métissage*, that became the focus of my investigation.

In order to pursue this new line of enquiry, I met with large numbers of *sans papiers* via different types of organizations that work with migrants in Marseille. In particular, I began conducting research at *La Cimade*, a well-known French *association*¹ that has been providing legal assistance to migrants ever since large waves of refugees washed over France during the Second World War. In view of its humanitarian mandate, I initially approached the *association* with a degree of critical distance. Yet, as I became familiar with the work and radical stance of its two Marseille delegates (who were in permanent conflict with the more conservative leaders in Paris), I decided to collaborate with *La Cimade* and to participate in some of its cultural and political activities. For almost two years now, I have been involved in the programming and animation of a film club presenting popular, art house, and documentary films to a mixed audience of migrants and French nationals. But most importantly, I have attended and helped organize the monthly, and later weekly reunions of *Groupe Confiance*—a collective of *sans papiers* and

¹ In France, *associations* are non-profit organizations that receive funding from the state.

French activists that initially functioned as a support group for undocumented migrants and gradually became a critical venue for *sans papiers* political organizing.

Through *La Cimade*, I have befriended, interviewed, and closely followed the lives of close to twenty *sans papiers* who regularly participate in the activities of *Groupe Confiance*; I have also come into contact with several others who accepted to share details of their lives with me, even though they have chosen not to join the collective. I have met additional *sans papiers* via the *AITE* and *Les amoureux au ban public*—associations that provide assistance to undocumented migrants and *couples franco-étrangers*² respectively—as well as through personal contacts. Over a period of three years, I have conducted more than a hundred semi-formal and informal interviews with (politicized and less politicized) undocumented migrants. I have also interviewed former *sans papiers*, some of whom now hold a one-year *carte de séjour* (residency permit) and others have managed to obtain French citizenship. In addition, I have visited many of the spaces in which *sans papiers* live, work, and circulate: worker hostels, squats, homeless shelters, apartments, construction sites, outdoor markets, etc. I have also spent considerable amounts of time at sites of confrontation between *sans papiers* and the state—namely, the *Préfecture*,³ the *Centre de Rétention Administrative*,⁴ the *Tribunal de Grande*

² *Couple franco-étranger* refers to a couple formed by a French citizen and a (generally undocumented) foreigner. These couples constitute a source of tremendous anxiety for state institutions and for the French population in general.

³ The *Préfecture* is the administrative building where *sans papiers* must submit (in person) their application for a residency permit.

Instance,⁵ and the Appeals Court in Aix-en-Provence. In turn, I have interviewed or discussed with dozens of volunteers and legal experts specialized in the rights of foreigners, several French and non-French activists, a well-known French union delegate who helped organize *sans papiers* strikers in Marseille during the 1990s and early 2000s, a judge, a customs officer, police agents at the CRA, and urban planners involved in a large-scale project of urban renewal in Marseille. Lastly, I have attended a number of political events that involved *sans papiers* either directly or indirectly: rallies in front of the *Préfecture*, a letter-writing campaign, a month-long *sans papiers* workers march throughout France, mobilizations at the port to protest against the deportation of *sans papiers* to North Africa, etc.

The *sans papiers* I have come to know in Marseille hail from a wide range of countries—most of them located in Africa (mainly Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Togo, Benin, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa, Sudan, Comoros, Cape Verde, Angola), some in Eastern Europe (Serbia, Bosnia, Albania, Russia), and others in the Middle East (Turkey, Armenia, Turkish and Iraqi Kurdistan, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan).⁶ Almost all the regular participants of *Groupe Confiance* are citizens

⁴ The *Centre de rétention administrative*, or CRA, is the administrative center where undocumented migrants subject to deportation are detained.

⁵ The *Tribunal de Grande Instance* is the specific court in which decisions are reached on whether arrested *sans papiers* should be detained or released.

⁶ Note that I have not met a single Chinese *sans papiers* in Marseille. This is in marked contrast with the situation in Paris, where large numbers of undocumented migrants from China are known to work in underground garment factories.

of former French colonies—a fact that has led me to suspect that language skills and a more intimate knowledge of French ways render postcolonial migrants more assertive than those who hail from non-French speaking countries.⁷ Though some of the *sans papiers* I have met come from fairly privileged backgrounds (one Senegalese woman’s uncle had been ambassador to Canada!) and/or enjoy a high level of education, the vast majority do not. Lastly, the male to female ratio among those I interviewed was approximately 60:40.

I should note in passing that, although I have white skin, speak French as the French do (I am a Québécoise who can hide her accent), and therefore look and sound ‘French,’ meeting and interviewing *sans papiers* in Marseille has proven fairly easy for me. On the one hand, my working as a volunteer at *La Cimade* has given me a credibility that I probably would not have enjoyed otherwise. The *association* appears to have a good reputation among Marseille’s *sans papiers*; and the critique of humanitarianism notwithstanding, I have not encountered a single migrant who suspected it of collaborating with the authorities (at least not openly).⁸

⁷ Sans papiers themselves claim that the most exploited migrants come not from Africa, but from Turkey or Afghanistan. These latter migrants very often do not get paid for their work because their social isolation and lack of language skills prevent them from claiming their due.

⁸ It is highly possible, however, that Marseille’s *sans papiers* looked less favorably on *La Cimade* years ago, when it was still commissioned by the state to uphold undocumented migrants’ rights within the CRAs. When Sarkozy decided to assign this mandate to other *associations* in 2009, many activists accused him of wanting to oust *La Cimade* for being too vocal in its criticism of police practices in detention centers. Yet as one of *La Cimade* delegates told me, the *association* had become a little too complicit with the authorities

On the other hand, almost every person I met in the field responded positively when I revealed that I was Québécoise. The French often fantasize about Québec, which represents to them the possibility of living in America while remaining in a French-speaking environment. As for migrants, they generally (and erroneously) believe that there is little or no racism in Canada, just as they remain oblivious to the country's own colonial history. For some mystifying reason, the majority of *sans papiers* I spoke with regarded Canada as an ideal destination, and often asked me how they could obtain papers to migrate across the ocean. No matter how hard I tried to explain that the Canadian approach to immigration is in reality more discriminatory than the French one⁹—to the extent that Nicolas Sarkozy himself

when it operated within the CRA; losing its mandate in Marseille (which had lasted no less than twenty-five years) had in fact enabled it to regain its autonomy and critical distance vis-à-vis the state. As it turns out, a couple of *sans papiers* detained inside the CRA told me they felt that the legal experts of *Forum Réfugiés*—the *association* that took up *La Cimade*'s mandate in Marseille—were helping the authorities arrange for their deportation as opposed to seriously fighting for their release.

⁹ Though Canada welcomes very large numbers of non-Western immigrants each year, and is famous for its state-sanctioned celebration of cultural diversity, the country's approach to immigration is far more restrictive than it appears. The policy of selective immigration is intended to attract wealthy and/or highly educated migrants from the south (i.e., people with 'high human capital'), while keeping the poor and unskilled ones at bay. Meanwhile, in sectors such as agriculture where there is a shortage of unskilled labor, a highly restrictive temporary worker system has been put in place to bring in less desirable migrants, who are then obligated to leave after they have accomplished the required labor. In fact, the geographic location of Canada (i.e., its only neighboring country being the US) facilitates

viewed Canada's policy of selective immigration as a model to reproduce—they held onto the fantasy of an 'open Canada.' Though I found such beliefs to be a little exasperating, I was nonetheless pleased that the country's positive reputation allowed me to navigate the field with greater ease.

Given the particular way in which I inserted myself into the field, the boundary between ethnographic research, political activism, and personal life has been for me at times a little thin. Many of the *sans papiers* I interviewed have become close friends. As a result, their trials have often affected me personally, and put me at times in an ethically difficult position. This was especially the case every time I went to provide 'moral support' to a friend who was detained in the CRA and was at risk of being deported. On the one hand, entering the CRA gave me the opportunity to observe—within legally set limits—the workings of state power in what is perhaps their crudest form. On the other hand, confronting my privilege to

the process of selection of migrants *before* they enter Canadian territory; hence border controls do not 'need' to be so strict as they do in other countries. One can easily make the case that the reason large-scale immigration has not generated the same level of tensions in Canada as it has in Europe is not because Canadians are more open to 'cultural difference,' but because the government has ensured that the influx of migrants would perfectly fit the Canadian economy's demand for labor. In effect, Canada provides a perfect example of a country in which multicultural policies have functioned hand in hand with a neoliberal, class-based logic of capital accumulation.

circulate in and out of the center¹⁰ while a friend was imprisoned for the simple ‘crime’ of being undocumented was always an unnerving experience.

Most importantly, my joint position as critical observer, volunteer, and ‘comrade’ at *La Cimade* has forced me to navigate between what often seem to be incompatible spaces. Insofar as the *association* operates within legal parameters, I have often feared that my participating in its activities would grant legitimacy to what is in my view (and that of many *Cimade* volunteers) an illegitimate law—the very law that separated me so brutally from the *sans papiers* I visited in the detention center. At the same time, because protests are not always as effective as one would hope, adopting the legal tools at one’s disposal to ensure that a *sans papiers* will not be deported is often the only option available in the short term. Faced with such contradictions, I came to appreciate both the value and the limitations of the critical literature on humanitarianism. I will return to the vexed question of humanitarian practice later in chapter 4, as I chart the political subjectivation of *sans papiers* within the space of *Groupe Confiance*. Suffice it to say for now that my research project has required me to achieve a precarious balance between my personal engagement with *sans papiers* and the need to step back and view the field—including my own position within it—through a critical lens. On a

¹⁰ I should nevertheless mention that I came very close to being incarcerated myself during my first visit to the CRA. The policewoman in charge of accompanying visitors that day was adamant that as a non-French EU citizen (I hold a Portuguese passport), I had no right to reside in the country for more than a year without requesting a *carte de séjour*. After a rather heated discussion, she finally spoke with her superior who confirmed my position that I was not obligated to request this document in order to remain in France.

more general level, the dialectical framework that organizes my dissertation reflects this two-fold methodological stance: While I have tried to render as faithfully as I could the immediate, subjective experiences of individual *sans papiers*, I have also continually sought to connect these to the broader political and economic processes that condition their emergence.

I should note here that my relationship to Marseille—another key protagonist in this dissertation—has also proven very personal. The extraterritorial character of the city, its liminal position as both south of the north and north of the south, have ensured that I would feel more at home here than I have anywhere else before. This is why, when time came for me to return to the United States to focus on dissertation writing, I realized I was far too attached to the city to leave. My love affair with Marseille has certainly informed my perception of the city and, consequently, the way I have represented it in this dissertation. The second half of chapter 1, in particular, provides a fairly intimate rendering of the city's (now vanishing) spatio-temporal common.

Most importantly, my decision to stay has meant that I have remained active in the field while writing my dissertation. In effect, I have continued collaborating with *La Cimade* and stayed in touch with most of the women and men whose stories I narrate here. I have thus had to adjust my argument throughout the writing process, as I sought to incorporate the new realities to which the *sans papiers* I befriended were confronted. Another consequence of this peculiar research chronology is that chapter 1, which describes Marseille as a long-term refuge for the refuse of capitalist modernity, was written months before the city became the 2013 European Capital of Culture. As a result, the chapter depicts a heterotopian landscape that has

considerably disappeared following the latest operations of the large-scale project of urban renewal known as *Euroméditerranée*. Insofar as chapter 1 provides an important context for understanding how *sans papiers*' experiences of space and time have changed in recent years, I have chosen to leave it mostly untouched. I address in chapter 2 instead the transformations that Marseille has undergone since I first moved to the city in 2008.

Ultimately, the order of chapters in my dissertation closely reflects my temporal trajectory into the field: from my initial discovery of Marseille as a port-city marked by the circulation and mingling of abject bodies in the urban center (chapter 1: *City of Dirt*), to my tracing the exclusions recently caused by the implementation of *Euroméditerranée* and the simultaneous proliferation of police controls (chapter 2: *Urban Enclosure and the New Immigration Regime*), to my exploration of undocumented migrants' experiences of space and time (chapter 3: *The Void of Exile*), and, finally, to my witnessing first-hand the political subjectivation of a small group of *sans papiers* (chapter 4: *Politics at the Void*). There is indeed a sense in which I began my research in relatively safe spaces, then moved to exploring the city's invisible margins, until I spent most of my time close to a group of women and men who together fought to emerge from the void of exile. Nevertheless, while my political engagement has prompted me to remain on the edge of this void, I have never forgotten that with my double Canadian-European citizenship, I never risk falling into its consuming vortex. Unfortunately, for many of the *sans papiers* whose stories I recount here, the chances of escape have remained rather dim.

INTRODUCTION

*What do they dream about? [...]
I say they dream about nothing.
They dream for lack of residence.*

Albert Londres
Marseille, Porte du sud
1927¹¹

*There is the day and there is the night,
and after the night comes the day.
For the moment, the night is long and the day takes time in coming [...]
How can you have all this [a home and a family]
when you are gone and you are still on the road?
The night means that I am alone and dirty.
When one has nothing, when one possesses nothing,
I wonder,
Is one still a man?*¹²

Young Sudanese *sans papiers*
quoted in Smaïn Laacher's *Le peuple des clandestins* (2007)

Before he committed suicide in Portbou, a little border-town perched on the mountainous cusp between France and Spain, Walter Benjamin found temporary refuge from the Nazi onslaught in the port-city of Marseille. In this liminal place that had welcomed all manners of strangers over the centuries, he was able to hide and rest, along with communists, resistance fighters, and countless other Jews. Benjamin was in exile not only from his German homeland at the time, but also—and perhaps most cruelly—from himself. As he had been rendered stateless by the new Nazi laws, he was deprived of everything that could prove to the world he was indeed Walter Benjamin, a Berliner, a writer, friend of Adorno and Brecht.

¹¹ My translation.

¹² My translation.

When the Germans occupied France and threatened to march towards Marseille, Benjamin knew that he had no choice but to leave his refuge in search of another. After being granted an emergency visa to enter the United States, he left for Lisbon where he was set to take a boat that would take him away from the nightmare that Europe had become. Upon reaching the French-Spanish border in Portbou, however, he found that a recent ruling had invalidated all entry visas delivered in Marseille, and that he would soon be forced to reenter French territory. This was a momentary, arbitrary decision on the part of the authorities, one that was in fact revoked the next day. But Benjamin preferred not to wait. In order to prevent his further and complete dehumanization, he chose to overdose on morphine in his hotel room, and was found in the morning lying dead on his bed. Benjamin, it seems, had felt that there was some refuge to be found in the exile of death.

Several decades later, Pierre landed in France following a three-year long journey that took him from the war-torn region of South Kivu in Congo-Kinshasa, through Congo-Brazzaville, the Sahara desert, Morocco, Algeria, and then finally to Marseille. For Pierre as for Benjamin before him,¹³ life was tenuous and fragile, and Marseille seemed to offer refuge from what promised to be a certain death. Pierre's father had been a military commander under the Mobutu regime, and his whole

¹³ I certainly do not wish to create a hierarchy between these two men by referring to the first by his last name and to the second by his first. Pierre happens to be someone I know well; hence I refer to him by his first name in my dissertation—as I do to all the *sans papiers* I met while doing research in Marseille. As for Benjamin, as much as I would like to have known him personally, I feel compelled to treat him as a historical figure.

family was decimated when Kabila took power in 1997. Although he could easily demonstrate he would likely be killed were he to be sent back to Congo-Kinshasa, the asylum claim he submitted upon arriving in Marseille was swiftly rejected. Refusing to alter his testimony to please the French authorities, Pierre never appealed the OPFRA's¹⁴ negative response. If the French had not believed him based on the evidence he had first provided, then he would insist no further. He preferred to have his history denied than to betray himself or the ones he had loved by distorting the events of his past.

Despite being forced into clandestinity, Pierre managed to survive in the liminal port-city, finding regular work in the local black market, marrying a young woman from his home region, and raising his two sons to be respectable men. On multiple occasions, he came alarmingly close to being arrested; but somehow fate would not have it so. After twelve years of living with the mind-numbing fear of being deported, he finally received his first *récépissé*.¹⁵ With his tiny yet enchanted document in hand, Pierre felt that his existence on French soil could now fully begin. Yet despite feeling considerably relieved, he also knew that because his *récépissé* could easily be revoked, he might still be sent to his death in his home country. This was, after all, the fate that had befallen Jean, his best friend and brother-in-law, who was swiftly deported to Congo-Kinshasa following a simple identity check near the Old Port of Marseille.

¹⁴ The French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons.

¹⁵ A *récépissé* consists of a small piece of paper, delivered by the *Préfecture*, which grants its holder the right to work, protects him or her from arrest by police, and anticipates the '*carte-de-séjour-to-come*.'

Many years have elapsed between the trials of Benjamin, a world-renowned writer persecuted for being Jewish, and those of Pierre, a young Congolese man caught in the turmoil of a particularly murderous war. Though one came from the north and the other from the south, the trajectories of these two men clearly echo one another. Fleeing persecution, Benjamin and Pierre found refuge in the same city—Marseille, an age-old land of asylum situated at the confines of the French polity. Stripped of their political identity, they were moreover equally vulnerable to sovereign decisions that could radically alter their future and their fate.

Yet the trajectories of Benjamin and Pierre also differ in significant ways. The configuration of the city in which they both transited has significantly changed between then and today. Marseille in 1942 was an unruly cosmopolitan seaport on the verge of being occupied by the Nazi army; its center is at present being cleansed of undesirable strangers through urban enclosure and the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders. In addition, each of these men was caught in a different logic of sovereign exception. Whereas Benjamin was directly targeted for extermination, Pierre was made to wander in exile at the mercy of violence and death. And if the first chose to end his own life to escape internment in a Nazi death camp, the second did manage to live on, even as he remained trapped in the social and political invisibility that comes with clandestinity.

What, one might ask, accounts for this historical shift in the condition of exile? Surely, the state does not kill nowadays as it did in Benjamin's time, but

instead makes live or lets die¹⁶—as Pierre’s story attests. The implications are, in turn, considerable. As more and more humans are reduced to bare life, states no longer view exile as a political matter. Refugees of all kinds are construed as mere waste, and the poor or persecuted are only rarely granted hospitality. Expelled by a simple decree from the realm of proper humans, large swaths of women and men are thus abandoned in the camps, ghettos, and other relegated spaces that now scatter our global landscape. Moreover, because these migrants have been pushed to the “margins of the world” (Agier 2008), they appear as a formless mass, without a name, a past, or a future.

Above all, if abjectified migrants wander by the millions today, it is because the prevailing economic logic that reduces all things and all beings to pure exchange value has so brutally transformed the world that they no longer find a place in it. With the accelerated enclosure of the global common, surplus populations have indeed been produced on a scale that had never been seen before. Thousands of uprooted humans have made their way to France as a result of this. While some were legally recognized upon or after landing here, the majority were not. These latter have had to suffer all that being ‘illegal’ entails: daily humiliations, overexploitation, and, increasingly, social isolation.

¹⁶ This observation derives from Foucault’s theorization of the biopolitical state as one designed to “foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (Foucault, 1986: 138). Commenting on Foucault and Agamben, Alain Brossat (2008) notes that the refugee camp today is a space designed to maintain life, in marked contrast with the Nazi camp whose primary purpose was to kill.

In Marseille, I have met in addition to Pierre hundreds of *sans papiers* who are drifting in clandestinity, fighting to survive, dodging deportation, and waiting for ‘true life’ to finally begin. Their trials surely echo those of the men and women who transited through the liminal port-city in earlier decades. Yet as I hope to show in the pages that follow, they are also symptomatic of the recent transformations the world has undergone under the neoliberal onslaught. *Sans papiers*’ haunting presence at the edge of Europe thus raises crucial questions concerning our violent present and tenuous future. Most importantly, their political struggles give us a glimpse of the common world that might still possibly be built: a world beyond papers, beyond value, and towards radical equality.

My dissertation traces undocumented migrants’ experiences at the edge of Europe, as well as their struggles to emerge from the spatio-temporal void to which they are being increasingly confined. By providing an ethnographic account of *sans papiers* who live, work, and organize politically in Marseille, I show how undocumented men and women in the border-city are being dislocated, depersonalized and devalued, and then account for the practices by which they seek to reconfigure the political community that refuses to see and hear them. In so doing, I elucidate the production of exile in a city increasingly transformed by urban enclosure and the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders. I investigate moreover *sans papiers*’ capacity to rupture, through a series of political actions, the naturalized space-time of the neoliberal security state.

Specifically, my dissertation is organized around the following three questions: 1) How have recent transformations in Marseille’s urban landscape and

the European immigration regime reconstituted the space-time of undocumented migrants in the cosmopolitan port-city? 2) What novel subjectivities are emerging out of these processes? 3) How can *sans papiers* rebuild, if at all, the common at the border of a nation predicated on their simultaneous exclusion and overexploitation? In answering these questions, my dissertation follows the experiential trajectory of migrants in Marseille from a (heterotopic) ‘off-place’ to the ‘void of exile’—a shift recently produced by the neoliberal reorganization of labor and the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders. It also traces the formation of a ‘generic class’ of overexploited workers who, in spite of contributing to building the new ‘global Marseille,’ are deprived of the right to have rights, of any social visibility, and indeed of any future to speak of.

My dissertation argues that, in the moment they emerge from the void and onto the political scene, *sans papiers* dissolve (if only momentarily) the walls that keep them locked within a regime of invisibility/hypervisibility. They interrupt, moreover, the logic of circulation and accumulation that is driving the enclosure of Marseille’s spatio-temporal common. Thus they point to the possibility of building—in a universalizing gesture—a radically different world: beyond papers, beyond value and towards radical equality.

1.1 Mapping the Literature on Irregular Migration

The phenomenon of irregular migration has attracted considerable attention among scholars in recent years. While the literature on the topic is at present vast and complex, a typology of the different approaches to the phenomenon can nevertheless be proposed here. Available studies are classified below based on how they construe the social world—namely capitalism and the state—and how they

conceptualize the migrant subject.

The first (and oldest¹⁷) approach has dealt with irregular migration as a sub-category of labor migration, and treated the phenomenon primarily as an effect of structural constraints. Generally Marxist in inspiration, this set of studies initially explained the south-north movement of migrants by referring either to the presence of a ‘dual labor market’ in affluent economies (Piore 1979) or to global inequalities stemming from a long history of colonialism, dependency and underdevelopment (Petras 1981, Wallerstein 1979). The violent nature of capitalism, the (re)production of a reserve army of labor (nowadays referred to as surplus populations), and, most importantly, the formation of a class of exploitable migrant workers were long the focus of this literature (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, Castells 1975, Castles and Kozack 1973). More recently, in order to account for the growing phenomenon of *irregular* migration, Marxist-inspired studies have shown how increasingly restrictive migration laws have helped produce the cheap, flexible and disposable labor force necessary for neoliberal restructuring to take place in economies of the north (Ali Nobil 2008; Anderson 2010, 2013; Bernardot 2012; Calavitta 2005; Marie 1999; Morice 2010; Moulier-Boutang 1997; Samers 2003, 2011; Terray 1999; Wills et al. 2010). By paying greater attention to the articulation between state policies and the requirements of capital, these latest works have shed considerable

¹⁷ I do not address here the older neo-classical and ‘push-pull’ approaches to the phenomenon of migration, and this for two reasons. First, these approaches are considered largely antiquated by contemporary scholars of migration owing to their positivist, functionalist and ahistorical bent (see Samers 2000). Second, their lack of a critical stance vis-à-vis the state-capital relation makes them irrelevant to the present discussion.

light on the new political economy of illegality. Owing to their methodological focus on the structures of capitalism, however, both old and recent studies have tended to produce deterministic accounts of migratory processes. As a result, they have generally overlooked the subjective experiences of migrants, as well as the political practices by which these can transform the politico-economic conditions that facilitate their exploitation.

The second approach has focused instead on the economic and cultural flows unleashed by globalization, and construed documented and/or undocumented migrants mainly as transnational (political and/or economic) actors. Writing in the fields of transnational studies (Portes et al. 1999, Glick Schiller et al. 1992, Vertovec 2004), globalization studies (Appadurai 1996, Inda and Rosaldo 2002), cultural studies (Papastergiadis 2000), or critical cosmopolitanism studies (Bhabha 1994, 2001; Cheah and Robbins 1998; Mignolo 2002), several authors have examined the cultural changes effected by migrants in their adopted countries and their countries of origin *via* their cross-border practices.¹⁸ In so doing, they have traced how hybrid identities and transnational solidarities are being produced in an increasingly globalized world, as well as how boundaries of citizenship are shifting with the large-scale entry of migrants into established national communities (Suarez-Navaz 2004). Meanwhile, a number of scholars have chosen to investigate specific migration trajectories, highlighting the complex strategies men and women deploy in their individual or collective migration projects. They have studied in particular the transnational economic networks (Brettell 2008, Tarrius 2000, Tilly 2007),

¹⁸ For transnational studies of migration to France, see in particular Derderian 2004, Sayad 1999, Silverstein 2004, and Thomas 2007.

ethnic entrepreneurs (De Hart 2010, Portes et al 2002), remittance economies (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011, Portes et al. 2002), smuggling and other illicit activities (Haddaoui 2010, Liempt and Doornik 2006), and female migrants' sex or domestic work (Anthias and Lazaridis 200, Constable 2007, Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004, Guillemaut 2004, Morokvasic 2003, Psimmenos 2000) that have developed along with globalization. Betraying the liberal assumptions upon which much of this literature rests,¹⁹ migrants are often construed here as self-interested economic actors who operate (relatively) freely in the state margins. Overall, this second approach has tended to minimize, if not completely overlook, the realities of state power as well as the severe constraints that come with being undocumented.

By contrast, a third strand of the literature has explained the rising number of undocumented migrants worldwide not by highlighting economic structures or depicting migrants as agents in/of globalization, but by exploring the paradoxes of state sovereignty. Drawing on Agamben's concept of bare life (1998)²⁰, this scholarship has powerfully brought to light, in Arendt's footsteps (1976), the contradictions of citizenship and Kantian cosmopolitanism (Kant 1983; Benhabib

¹⁹ Several of these studies draw on the 'new economics of migration' paradigm. Though the latter posits that migration decisions are taken not individually but at the household or community level, it nevertheless retains many of the assumptions of neoclassical economics (rational decision-making, utility maximizing behavior, income diversification, risk aversion, etc.)

²⁰ In developing this notion, Agamben expanded on Schmitt's theory of the sovereign exception (1985), Foucault's concept of biopower and Arendt's critique of human rights (1976).

2004; Habermas 1998). It has also documented how state (re)foundings of political community are increasingly predicated on the exclusion/abjection of certain types of bodies (Balibar 2001, 2006; Butler 2004; Honig 2001; Nyers 2005). In the specific context of France, anthropological studies have unveiled the modalities of violence that are produced when state sovereignty articulates with the global regime of universal human rights. In particular, some authors have traced the moral economy of compassion and repression that has developed in humanitarian practice and discourse (Redfield 2005) in response to the massive influx of undocumented persons within the metropole (Fassin 2005; Ticktin 2011). Expanding on this critique of state sovereignty, some authors have attended in turn to the political practices of undocumented persons. Deploying Jacques Rancière's theory of political subjectivation (1995), they have begun mapping the ways in which the political claims and spatial practices of undocumented migrants help undermine the logic of sovereignty itself (Nyers 2006). By showing how migrants can actively displace the institution of citizenship, these last authors have refrained from representing undocumented persons in ways that would push them further into the realm of invisibility. Nevertheless, because the primary focus here is on the encounter between undocumented migrants and the state, the capitalist dynamics that underpin the production of illegality remain largely undertheorized in this approach.

Filling these lacunae, the fourth and last approach has turned to studying the interconnections between state sovereignty and contemporary capitalist dynamics. One group of scholars has redeployed Foucault's concepts of biopower and neoliberal governmentality to investigate the modalities of migrant

inclusion/exclusion that are currently being generated through different assemblages of state and capital. Exemplary in this regard is the work of Aihwa Ong (2006), who has explored the various forms of market-driven exception²¹ that have been disrupting established practices of citizenship and sovereignty in the Asian context. In turn, the increasingly influential ‘autonomy of migration’ scholars (De Genova 2009, 2011; De Genova and Peutz 2010; Mezzadra 2011; Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013; Squire 2011; Bigo 2004, 2011) have studied irregular migration by expanding on Hardt and Negri’s (Deleuze-inspired) analysis of the multitudes under Empire (Hardt and Negri 2000). Significant attention is paid in their work to borders, which they construe as spatial techniques that help secure capital accumulation by regulating the circulation of migrants between and within states. Though autonomy of migration scholars acknowledge that states continue to exert significant control over the bodies of migrants, they nevertheless posit the latter’s freedom of movement “as an ontological condition of human life” (Peutz and De Genova 2010: 8) that is always in excess of state power. In view of this, they approach borderzones not as sites of biopolitical control (as in the Agambian literature), but rather as sites of political struggle. For the most part, this fourth approach has paid considerable attention to emerging practices of ‘non-citizen citizenship,’ that have emerged under neoliberalism beyond the ambit of traditional nation-states.

1.2 The Spatio-Temporality Of Exile

The approaches I have just reviewed each offer a useful lens through which to address the growing phenomenon of irregular migration. As such, they have

²¹ Note that Ong (re)defines exception as “an extraordinary departure in policy that can be deployed to include as well as to exclude” (Ong 2006: 5).

informed to varying degrees my research on *sans papiers* in Marseille. Neither of these approaches has proved fully satisfactory, however, to account for the present-day production and experience of exile at Europe's southern edge. This is so, I argue, because each of them relies on a flawed conceptualization of the state-capital relation and the process of subject constitution.

While Marxist-inspired scholars have fruitfully explored the laws and institutional constraints that facilitate the exploitation of migrants, the state-capital relation nevertheless remains undertheorized in their work. By studying the political economy of migration through an empiricist lens that is all but dialectical, they have reified the state, overlooked capitalism's contradictory nature, and viewed the practices of migrants as mere effects of economic processes. The second group of scholars has, by contrast, stressed the mobility and agency of migrants, but has done so to the point where the state has all but disappeared from view. Moreover, by seeking to move away from deterministic and economistic accounts of migratory processes, they have ended up naturalizing capitalism as a set of unfettered flows.

The third approach has provided an important account of the inclusive exclusions that are being generated through practices of sovereign exception. Nevertheless, studies of bare life are also lacking because they fail to connect migrants' exclusion from citizenship to the evolving dynamics of capitalism. Here as in most Foucaultian approaches, power is construed as an overarching, free-floating abstraction, and the social relations that underpin state sovereignty and the production of illegality are obfuscated.²²

²² In a compelling critique of the current intellectual reception of Carl Schmitt, Benno Teschke observes that the theory of the sovereign decision fails to account for the social

Finally, although the last group of scholars has studied capital and the state conjointly, the Foucaultian and/or Deleuzian grounding of politics in ontology ultimately produces an ahistorical—i.e., descriptive as opposed to explanatory—account of migratory processes. In particular, by construing the movement of the multitudes as a pure ontological will that can be captured by the state yet is always in excess of it, autonomy of migration scholars disregard the fact that migrant flows are foremost triggered by the invisible hand of capitalism. On the one hand, this blind spot has prompted these scholars to fetishize not only the mobility of migrants, but also the margins in which these are (problematically) assumed to escape state capture. On the other hand, by construing the state merely as that which captures the creative affirmation of migrants (*qua* the new multitudes), autonomy of migration scholars have completely underestimated the role of states in producing the contemporary world. Overall, because they rest upon anti-dialectical ontologies and epistemologies, Foucaultian and Deleuzian approaches cannot account for radical ruptures, and hence effectively remain “on the level of the surface appearances of capital’s newest configuration,” to use Moishe Postone’s formulation (2012: 246).²³

relations of sovereignty that drive the decision on the state of exception. One ought to remember, he writes, that the state of exception “remains bound to the social by an indispensable act of calculation, preceding its declaration, as to its chances of implementation and daily public compliance or resistance by those upon whom it bears” (2011: 80). Schmitt’s theory remains in his view purely theological owing to its failure to account for the social field of power relations.

²³ In a similar vein, Isabelle Garo (2011) argues that post-68 philosophy—namely Althusser, Foucault, and Deleuze—has successfully critiqued the political and cultural forms of the

As such, they reify capital and the state just as the first approaches did.

In order to avoid this sort of reification, I have chosen to investigate the contemporary production and experience of exile in Marseille by deploying a dialectical political economy framework. The purchase of this approach is in my view two-fold. First, it allows me to connect the spatio-temporal processes occurring in my fieldwork site to the global material and historical structures within which it is embedded. Thus, I construe the invisible spaces in which *sans papiers* are overexploited—what I refer to as the flexible underground—not as an excess of order building, but as the product *and* necessary condition for the reproduction of capitalist relations. Second, insofar as dialectic thinking acknowledges the existence of a gap between presentation and representation (to use Badiou's terminology 1988), or between social substance and the mind (to use Žižek's 2006), it accounts for the possibility of radical ruptures in the spatio-temporal configuration of the present world.

My dialectical approach, moreover, integrates the most recent Marxist contributions to the fields of migration and urban studies. Unlike classic Marxist and Marxist-inspired studies that focalized on time to the detriment of space, this recent scholarship (see Anderson 2004; Castree 2009; Harvey 1982, 2006; Samers 2011)

Fordist period, yet has failed to produce a substantial critique of the post-Fordist period within which it was born. As a result, she says, this philosophy has conceded to its capitalist adversary the conditions of its own definition, and has thus been unable to imagine a radical alternative to the contemporary world. For another insightful critique of Deleuzian/Foucaultian ontologies and epistemologies, see Kurtz and Jappe (2003).

has paid close attention to the joint production of space and time under capitalism. In line with this approach, I was able to observe that processes of spatial differentiation—i.e., urban enclosure and border building—have served capital accumulation in Marseille, and this by splitting spaces and bodies between those that are assigned value and those that are construed as waste. I thus construe center-periphery relations in my work, not as an effect of state power and/or normative regimes, but as a particular spatialization of class relations. Drawing on the recent Marxist literature has also prompted me to examine how exile and ‘illegality’ are produced at the juncture between capital and the state, and to assign centrality to space and time as key categories of migrant experience. This has enabled me to observe how, owing to urban enclosure and the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders, *sans papiers* in Marseille are increasingly immobilized in space and time, and therefore find themselves gradually locked in what I term the void of exile.

In recent years, social theorists have increasingly considered the worldwide production of surplus populations as a structural, and not merely conjunctural factor of late capitalism. As a result, they have begun to view the walls and barriers that are being erected to keep these populations at bay as a permanent feature of our global landscape. A number of scholars (see, for instance, Lucht 2012, Gupta and Ferguson 2001) have further argued that surplus populations are effectively disconnected from the global economy. Because they are excluded from wage labor, these authors claim, surplus men and women have fallen out of globalization.

While these authors are certainly right in their assessment of capitalism’s ongoing crisis, my dialectical framework suggests, on the contrary, that these spaces and bodies are part and parcel of the global economy. For spatio-temporal

differentiation, as Harvey insists, is precisely that which fuels the creative destruction central to capitalism. In other words, if walls and borders have become so pervasive today, it is not merely because the proper-tied classes want to push human waste out of sight, but because capitalism thrives more than ever before on the fragmentation of the world in a time of crisis. The feelings of disconnection experienced by surplus populations worldwide must thus be viewed as stemming not from their effective economic delinking, but from their thorough integration into an increasingly differentiated and uneven global economy.

The point I have just made is key. Throughout my dissertation, I attempt to show that the void of exile in which *sans papiers* are increasingly confined is materially produced by both capital and the state. Sans papiers may be feeling radically excluded in the relegated spaces of the Mediterranean city, but their raw, undocumented labor has proved pivotal for restoring capital accumulation under neoliberalism—and this through the development of new, highly exploitative labor arrangements in the informal economy. In fact, as I will show in the pages to come, *sans papiers'* modes of political subjectivation have developed precisely at this juncture between radical exclusion and overexploitation.

1.3 Undocumented Subjects

Available studies on irregular migration present a second set of problems, which stem, I argue, from their flawed conceptualization of the undocumented *subject*. Overall, they have oscillated between a moralistic/deterministic account of migrant victimization (often reinforced by migrants themselves) and a liberal (and hence normative) one that emphasizes the creativity and ingeniousness of migrants who choose to migrate freely, sometimes even in a strategy of enrichment. The first

approach tends to render invisible the subjects of migration, thereby reproducing humanitarianism's depoliticizing gesture. Meanwhile, the second obscures the forms of domination and exploitation that undocumented migrants experience as they travel across borders.

Moralizing or deterministic accounts of migratory processes that erase the migrant *subject* have no doubt shown their limitations. Yet the now fashionable celebration of *sans papiers*' strategic agency and/or spontaneous circulation (or pure subjectivity in Hardt and Negri's account) seems to me equally dubious, and this for two reasons. First, celebrating the agency, mobility and creativity of undocumented migrants tends to obfuscate the huge power differential that separates them from the privileged, documented academic doing the observing. This becomes particularly evident in the work of autonomist scholars, who seem more concerned with projecting their own anarchist desires onto *sans papiers* than with listening to what they are effectively saying. Second, this posture risks blinding us to the underlying inequalities that compel *sans papiers* to live a life they have only rarely chosen, and hence to the considerable constraints that condition the choices, tactics and strategies that are available to them. As I show in chapter 4, these constraints must be fully addressed if one is to grasp the modalities by which *sans papiers* can emerge onto the political scene, and thereby transform the world that is objectifying them.

In effect, I believe that research on *sans papiers* subjectivities cannot afford to overlook the myriad degradations migrants experience by virtue of being paperless. To be sure, *sans papiers* are resourceful and inventive beings; and there is no denying that migrants often strategically recount their stories in ways that instill compassion in more powerful listeners. Yet the research I conducted in Marseille

has taught me that the majority of undocumented migrants experience their lives not in terms of affirmative desire, but first and foremost in terms of deprivation. Theirs is, indeed, an experience of lack. Smaïn Laacher expressed this most compellingly in his remarkable ethnographic study, *Le peuple des clandestins*:

To those (intellectuals, journalists, researchers, activists) who see in the *clandestin* [undocumented migrant] a sort of cosmopolitan intellectual who joyfully jumps borders [...], I would like to recall that these populations who now number in the millions are living a life of indignity, a condition experienced as a shameful mark of inferiority—even as they have learned all the subtleties and futilities of resistance and resourcefulness. One should not read in this proposition any concession to a miserabilistic interpretation. Such a posture is as remote from me as is its opposite: the poor and unloved undocumented migrant turned into the hero of modern times. [...] *The narrative of he who leaves his country is not organized around a demand for “freedom of circulation,” but around an experience of injustice* (my emphasis and my translation, Laacher 2007: 100-101).

While *sans papiers* experience their condition as one of deprivation, lack, and radical exile, they nevertheless explicitly respond to the injustice that is being done to them. Investigating this response has demanded that I stay attuned to the words of migrants, to the minute language of their often ravaged bodies, and to all that they would reveal of their intimate selves (beyond the formulaic narratives usually reserved for representatives of the law). If this approach has at times led me to portray the experiences of *sans papiers* in a somewhat despairing light, it is no doubt because their lives are more frequently marked by anguish than by joy. As I hope to show in the pages to come, the despair of those of have been reduced to bare life may in fact be driving a more radical sort of politics, one grounded in *sans papiers*’ longing for a place where they can be human again—and indeed one that would constitute an answer to Brahim’s question with which I introduced this chapter: “When one has nothing, when one possesses nothing, is one still a man?”

Investigating *sans papiers*' response to the experience of radical lack has led me to read political subjectivation through Alain Badiou's concept of the void. This concept is key, for it allows me to connect the spatio-temporality of exile to the experience of lack that drives the political subjectivation of *sans papiers* in Marseille. In other words, in the dialectical framework I propose here, the void is at once material (a process of space-time implosion that leads to gaps in the social fabric) and experiential (the lack of a place that prompts *sans papiers* to engage in radical forms of politics). Most importantly, the concept of the void points to the revolutionary potential of *sans papiers* politics. In effect, because they are positioned in the voids of neoliberal postmodernity (that is, in sites of radical disidentification), *sans papiers* form a generic class that must engage in universalizing politics if they are to find a place in the world again. In this sense, *sans papiers* are like Marx's proletariat, revolutionary not by virtue of their specificity as a class, but by virtue of their need to achieve universality in order to abolish class society.

1.4 On Genericity

My focus on spatio-temporality has helped me unearth processes which much of the recent literature on irregular migration seems to have obfuscated. To begin, by taking the political economy of border building seriously, I was able to see that the production of 'illegal' migration is not merely the outcome of nationalist fantasies or a violent assertion of state sovereignty, but most importantly, a spatio-temporal technique aimed at weakening and cheapening labor for capital's benefit. In other words, the neoliberal drive for profit requires that laboring subjects be split today between documented and undocumented workers. In view of this, I consider

that the Othering of *sans papiers* must be addressed as an effect of border building, and not as its driving force.

My research has shown in fact that the Othering of *sans papiers* is of a very special kind. *Sans papiers* are not exactly racialized at the edge of Europe,²⁴ but stripped of their identities. On the one hand, *sans papiers* in-exist in the order of state representation. On the other hand, locked as they are in the void of exile, they undergo dislocation, depersonalization, and devaluation all at once, which radically alters their sense of self. In view of this, *sans papiers* cannot ground their politics in any sort of identity claims. On the contrary, they come together around a shared experience of lack, creating political commonalities outside of established communities. This leads me to argue that a class of generic—i.e., dis-identified—undocumented workers is being formed in Marseille as a result of their legal erasure.

My dissertation explores in turn the political practices of *sans papiers* that emerge out of their immobilization in time and space. Specifically, I examine how, no longer content with hiding and waiting for documents that may eventually endow their existence with state-sanctioned value, these women and men have begun engaging in a wide range of political actions—including rallies, protests against the deportation of fellow *sans papiers*, letter-writing campaigns, etc. It is my contention that, through such “modes of political subjectivation” (Rancière 1995), ‘abject’ migrants are turning themselves into political subjects while also effecting a rupture in the naturalized space-time of the neoliberal security state. For in the very moment they erupt on the political scene, *sans papiers* not only (if momentarily) dissolve the

²⁴ Though, of course, individual African *sans papiers* are still perceived through the lens of the racist, colonial past.

walls that keep them locked within a regime of invisibility, they also interrupt the logic of value circulation and accumulation that sustains the enclosure of Marseille's spatio-temporal common.

Most importantly, by asserting that those who are separated by arbitrary nationality laws are in fact always already connected through the (im)materiality of labor, *sans papiers* workers demand to radically transform the world that excludes and abjectifies them. In the very moment they appear onto the political scene, these formerly invisible and inaudible subjects not only redistribute what Rancière (1995) refers to as 'the order of the sensible,' they also participate in the construction of a new, universalizing political community. As such, they open up a future previously closed to them, one which escapes the neoliberal timeframe of capital accumulation. By investigating how such modes of political subjectivation have emerged at the Marseillais borderland, my dissertation contributes to current debates in political philosophy concerning the production/reconfiguration of the common and the return of universalizing political projects.

At a time when the dominated are increasingly fragmented, pit against one another in the race for mere survival, *sans papiers* who have been dislocated, depersonalized and devalued have nothing to propose but the radical equality that comes with nakedness. Those humans who are trapped in the void are no doubt in pain, but they also constitute the generic class of those who have nothing to lose but their chains. As Marx and Badiou remind us, the generic is that which generates something completely new, a radical alterity that is not already there in the world, or emerging in its margins, but is rather another world to build (and not to come, as waiting will do no more!). What the generic class can produce, then, is the

Badiouian event, which is necessarily other-than-Being, and which alone offers the promise of universal equality.

1.5 Outline of Dissertation

In the coming pages, I critically review the literature that bears on the key theme(s) around which each one of my chapters is organized. These themes are namely: *dirt* (chapter 1); *urban enclosure* and *the new immigration regime* (chapter 2); *the space-time of migrants* (chapter 3); and *citizenship* (chapter 4). Though the first part of my dissertation draws to some extent on observations from the field, it is based mostly on historical studies and archives, government reports, as well as secondary literature on the production of irregular migration in Europe and beyond. This section traces the broader politico-economic processes that have been fostering the emergence of a generic class in France, and in Marseille in particular. The second part is primarily ethnographic. It is concerned with the specific *sans papiers* subjectivities that have been emerging in Marseille, in a context marked by urban enclosure and the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders. It describes *sans papiers*' experiences of space-time implosion, their modes of (non)sociality, as well as their nascent political engagements.

My dissertation is thus organized around two interrelated axes. **First**, I set the general context for my ethnographic study of *sans papiers*, exploring the peculiar position Marseille has occupied historically in France, as well as the significant transformations the city has undergone during the last decade. In chapter 1, *City of Dirt*, I trace the development of Marseille as a marginal and impoverished border-town that has welcomed wave after wave of migrants over the centuries, and that has consequently been associated with dirt and its many dangers in the French

imagination. I then show how the city's long-standing poverty and illegibility, the fluidity of its racial and cultural boundaries, and its extensive underground economy have together made for a unique experience of belonging and exile. In this 'off-place of capitalist modernity,' I argue, the urban common was preserved until very recently. The circulation of abject, migrant bodies long proved largely unfettered, while capital and commodity flows encountered regular friction.

Having traced the unique urban configuration of Marseille, I explore in chapter 2, *Urban Enclosure and the New Immigration Regime*, the ways in which the city has recently become a crucial site for the redefinition of French and European identities. I specifically investigate the implementation of *Euroméditerranée*, a large-scale project of urban renewal which is seeking to integrate the stagnating port-city into the space-time of neoliberal France by 'cleansing' the urban center of undesirables. I examine moreover how the recent reinforcement of (supra)national borders has facilitated urban enclosure by producing a class of migrant workers who, in spite of contributing to building the new 'global' Marseille, are deprived of the right to have rights, of the ability to circulate freely, and indeed of any future to speak of. I conclude that proper-tied citizens' current experience of space-time compression in Marseille has as its obverse the space-time implosion suffered by this disposable, undocumented labor force.

Second, I trace the specific *sans papiers* subjectivities that are being produced in Marseille out of this process of space-time implosion. In chapter 3, *The Void of Exile*, I examine how the consolidation of (supra)national borders and the new immigration regime have together transformed undocumented migrants'

experience of space-time in Marseille. I explore how the increasingly repressive procedures by which the presence of migrants on French soil is rendered illegal are reducing the intimate, vital space of Marseille's *sans papiers* to virtually nothing. I also shows how the joint processes of criminalization/victimization and (in)visibilization/(im)mobilization are altering *sans papiers*'s sense of self, while also securing their disposability in the flexible underground.

In chapter 4, I explore the politics of *sans papiers* as they collectively struggle to emerge from the spatio-temporal void to which they are being increasingly confined, stressing as I do so the radical implications of *sans papiers*' increased positioning 'outside' of space and time. Through a close examination of the *Groupe Confiance* collective at *La Cimade*, I show that a common experience of dislocation, depersonalization and devaluation in the void of exile has prompted the emergence of a generic class of *sans papiers* in Marseille. In turn, I examine how, in the moment they erupt on the political scene, generic *sans papiers* can effect—in a universalizing gesture—a rupture in neoliberal space-time, and thereby build a new spatio-temporal common at the border of the European (supra)nation.

CHAPTER 1

CITY OF DIRT

*Marseilles—the yellow-studded maw of a seal
with salt water running out between the teeth.
When this gullet opens to catch the black and brown proletarian bodies
thrown to it by ship’s companies according to their timetables,
it exhales a stink of oil, urine, and printer’s ink.
This comes from the tartar baking hard on the massive jaws:
newspaper kiosks, lavatories, and oyster stalls.
The harbor people are a bacillus culture, the porters and whores
products of decomposition with a resemblance to human beings.*

Walter Benjamin
Marseilles
1929

Wandering through the streets of Marseille for the very first time can often feel like an encounter with dirt. It is hard not to see the shards of broken glass, dog feces and mountains of heap that litter the center of this Mediterranean border-town, and indeed Marseille is often said to be Europe’s filthiest city, along with Naples in Southern Italy. My own entry into the field was certainly a harbinger of dirty things to come. As I walked my dog around the downtown train station one day after moving to the city, I was stopped on my way home by two empty beer bottles thrown off a fourth story window, which nearly killed me and my pet in a strange welcoming event. Similar though less perilous experiences befell me after that surreal night—with the following two being perhaps the most telling. As I left my new apartment building one morning, I stepped into a smelly yellowish puddle, only to discover that the entrance door served as a collective urinal for the neighborhood drunks. And on a hot summer evening, a soft drink bottle flew into my living room via the wide-open window, abruptly suspending a highbrow discussion among friends and splattering my anthropology books with a sticky brown fluid.

Yet most striking to unsuspecting newcomers is undoubtedly the city residents' relationship to dirt. In many ways, ordinary Marseillais seem to construe public spaces as little more than garbage dumps, hopelessly wasted sites onto which they can throw their rubbish without concern for passersby. They vigorously brush off those decent citizens who criticize their improper manners, dismissing them as mere Parisian *bourges*²⁵ who fail to grasp the anarchic beauty of their gritty city. And though they occasionally grumble about the sluggishness of local garbage men, most accept with panache the dirt that mars their surroundings. When I apologized to a corner store owner after my pet had urinated onto his business floor, he laughed generously at my embarrassment and noted that a little dog pee was nothing serious, especially compared to the human excrements a homeless man had left in that very same spot just a week earlier.

As I soon discovered, the negative imagery of dirt has been central to representations of the city that have circulated over the years in France and in Europe at large. In essays, novels, films and news reports of the last centuries, Marseille has been portrayed consistently as a city of dirt, poverty, and myriad perils.²⁶ In the media and everyday discourse today, it is clearly associated with filth, incivility, and national decay. Viewed as a door to barbarian lands, as an illegible place teeming with outcasts, criminals and foreign diseases, Marseille has never truly been a part of France, nor Europe for that matter, in the mainstream

²⁵ *Bourge* is the French slang for bourgeois.

²⁶ For a review of negative representations of Marseille, see mainly Boura 2001, Cesari et al. 2001, Dell'Umbria 2006, Gastaut 2003, Sberna 2002, and Temime 1990.

imagination. It has been construed rather as a stain on the nation, and more generally, on modern civilization.

Nazi General Karl Oberg, head of the Gestapo in France, evidently thought as much when he proclaimed in 1943: “This city is the canker of Europe, and Europe cannot live as long as Marseille has not been decontaminated” (my translation, quoted in Dell’Umbria 2006: 487). Oberg merely reproduced with these words a discourse that had gained currency in France decades prior to the Occupation.²⁷ In fact, it was following an architectural plan designed earlier by local authorities that he organized the large-scale evacuation and dynamiting of the Old Port quarter,²⁸ then known for its congested alleyways, decrepit buildings, seedy bars and shady occupants. From January 22nd to 28th 1943, he oversaw a vast police operation in the area that targeted communists and resistance fighters as well as “crime-recidivists, pimps, homeless, vagrants, people without identity papers or food ration cards, Jews, illegal migrants, deportees, and every single person who has

²⁷ Especially violent was an article published in 1942 in the municipal review *Marseille*. Louis Gillet, member of the *Académie Française*, wrote: “On the Accoules hill slopes, between City Hall and the Cathedral of La Major, lies an obscene slum, a most impure cesspit in which Mediterranean scum has accumulated—sad glory of Marseille—in a state of decay and putrefaction difficult to conceive without seeing it first. Even stones seem to have been corrupted by depravity and leprosy. In this worm-eaten hell, this sort of decomposing mass grave, tuberculosis wreaks havoc. It is the empire of sin and death. How can we disinfect and regenerate those formerly bourgeois quarters now abandoned to the rabble, to misery and to shame?” (my translation, quoted in Dell’Umbria, 2006: 485).

²⁸ In *Banjo* (1929), a novel about black sailors and dockworkers in 1920s Marseille, Claude McKay refers to the Old Port quarter as the Ditch.

not worked legally in over a month” (my translation, quoted in Dell’Umbria 2006: 485). All in all, 25 000 people were forced out of their homes, 12 000 were taken to a detention camp outside the city, and among the latter 1650 were sent to death camps in Germany. Then, from February 1st to February 19th, the German Wehrmacht destroyed one after the other a total of 1 482 houses in the Old Port quarter, thus eradicating with the endorsement of local elites what had seemed the filthiest of places, in effect the oldest neighborhood of Marseille and one of the oldest in France (Dell’Umbria 2006: 485-487).



Figure 1.1: The Evacuation of the Old Port Quarter
Source: Collection du Musée d'Histoire de Marseille



Figure 1.2: The Demolition of the Old Port Quarter
***Source: Etablissement de communication
et de production audiovisuelle de la Défense***



Figure 1.3: After the Blast
Source: Collection du Musée d'Histoire de Marseille

Today, seventy years after the demolition of the Old Port quarter, the men and women who inhabit the urban center are still being construed as a stain to be removed by those who wish to turn Marseille into a dynamic global city. With the ongoing implementation of a large-scale project of urban renewal, *Euroméditerranée*, global entrepreneurs and their local political allies are in effect hoping to bring economic progress to the stagnating port-city by pushing undesirable bodies from the urban center and into the peripheral Northern zone. The mayor's deputy in charge of town planning made this clear when he stated in 2003: "We need people who create wealth. We must get rid of half the city's inhabitants. The heart of the city deserves something else" (my translation, Claude Valette quoted in *Le Figaro*, 18 November 2003). Evidently, for the mayor and for his acolytes, the filthy, dangerous classes of Marseille do not merely threaten the

fantasized integrity of France; they also prevent the circulation and accumulation of capital necessary for the city to integrate the time of neoliberal postmodernity.

Why so much dirt? What is the signification of proliferating waste at the edge of modern-day Europe? Why has Marseille been associated for so long with dirt and its many dangers? And why has the city been the object of countless purification projects on the part of French, European and now global elites?

This chapter attempts to make sense of Marseille's dirt predicament through an investigation of the city's historical past and recent ethnographic present. It also provides a general reflection on the production and accumulation of waste at the border of Europe in the neoliberal moment. **To begin**, I critically review some of the key theories on dirt, abjection and/or waste, and argue that dirt must be apprehended in Marseille at the dialectical juncture between space and time. **Second**, I trace the historical development of Marseille at the Mediterranean border, showing how the city's peculiar relationship with the emerging French state and the rise of imperial capitalism has helped constitute it as an off-place of capitalist modernity in which human and material waste have accumulated over time. **Third**, I explore the spatio-temporal configuration of Marseille as I encountered it when I first moved here in 2008, linking the omnipresence of dirt in the Mediterranean city to boundary failure and economic stagnation at Europe's southern edge. I argue that, in contrast to modernity's core places, in the off-place of Marseille abject bodies have circulated with relative ease, whereas capital and commodity flows have encountered recurrent friction. I conclude that, in Marseille, the common thrives in the form of dirt, in contrast to the core places of modernity in which the norms of *propreté* (cleanliness), propriety and property prevail.

1.1 Dirt In Theory

1.1.1 The Abject as Excess

Dirt, along with its related concepts of abjection and waste, has been studied in a wide range of disciplines, from anthropology, history, geography, sociology and psychoanalysis all the way to literature. Several authors have approached dirt as a social construct, traced its connection to boundaries—spatial, cognitive, corporeal, material or symbolic – and analyzed it as a function of order building. Most notably, anthropologist Mary Douglas argued in *Purity and Danger* (1966) that pollution taboos across different cultures are not essentially concerned with hygiene, but rather with the maintenance of the boundaries that hold social structures in place. Thus, she defined dirt as that which falls outside of established categories or, in an oft-cited phrase, as “matter out of place” (1966: 44). By showing dirt to lie in excess of classificatory orders, Douglas helped explain the common association of marginalized populations and spaces with pollution and danger, and simultaneously revealed dirt’s political potential in disrupting prevailing socio-spatial norms. She came to inspire as a result several studies on the power mechanisms that undergird clean/unclean dichotomies. These include examinations of the exclusions produced by the development of hygienic codes in modern societies (Bashford 2004, Engler 2004, Kirby 2011), analyses of the metaphors of purity enacted in the construction of national identities (Campt 2003, Cresswell 1996, Sundberg 2008), and studies of political movements that have deployed dirt—shit or bodily fluids—as a form of protest against state violence (Neti 2003).

By contrast, dirt has been analyzed in the field of psychoanalysis primarily in relation to subject formation. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905),

Freud set the ground for future psychoanalytical explorations of dirt as he examined the psychosexual development of the child. He showed how, during the anal phase, the child begins to test the boundaries between self and other as it learns to master its bodily functions and becomes obsessed with giving or withholding feces. Freud argued that the child's manipulation of its own excrements is in fact part of a more general socialization process by which the subject integrates prevailing norms of cleanliness while developing the capacity for autonomy and self-mastery. Though several authors have expanded on Freud's theory of anality, it is Julia Kristeva who, under the rubric of abjection, has provided what is perhaps the most comprehensive psychoanalytical account of dirt to date. In *The Powers of Horror* (1982), she noted that the abject has "only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to the I" (Kristeva 1982: 1). Kristeva meant by this that the abject emerges at the border between subject and object as that which needs to be continually expelled for the ego to come into being and retain its vital space. Because this process of expulsion can never be complete, however, the abject necessarily haunts the subject, threatening to undo at any time the fragile boundaries of his/her identity as well as the differentiated order upon which these rest.

Drawing largely on Kristeva, philosopher Judith Butler explored in turn the role that racism and other forms of abjectification play in processes of subject constitution and society formation. In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler referred specifically to the abject as "those 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of subject, but whose living under the sign of 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject" (Butler 1993: 3). By enlarging Kristeva's

psychoanalytical concept to account for broader social processes, Butler effectively traced the way modern spaces and citizens are produced via the expulsion to their outer limits of bodies deemed less than human.

Though he never analyzed the category of dirt *per se*, Michel Foucault similarly explored in his work how processes of order building rely on the construction of certain bodies and spaces as abject. On the one hand, in his studies on biopower and governmentality, Foucault explored how the state came to deploy theories of disease and contagion as it sought to manage and foster the life of populations lying within its borders. Thus he showed that the field of hygiene emerged in the modern period as an important technique of population control, with dirt being constituted as an object of management that proved essential to the making of the social body. On the other hand, in *Madness and Civilization* (1965), he traced the gradual partition of Renaissance society into new zones of purity and danger which became key to the development of the modern world. He examined specifically how ‘civilized’ spaces were produced via the removal and confinement of the mad and the poor in closed institutions, as modern society increasingly defined itself as the bearer of Reason in opposition to the threat of unregulated madness. The asylum eventually proved a key figure in this process of socio-spatial purification, which effectively pushed the mad into the realm of invisibility and ended the dialogue between reason and unreason that had prevailed in earlier times.

Expanding on the insights of Foucault, Dominique Laporte argued in *History of Shit* (2000) that the modern state essentially functions as the sewer of modernity. He noted that the state first constituted itself in the sixteenth century as a divine, purifying agent which sought to maintain Freud’s civilizational triad of ‘cleanliness,

order and beauty' (Laporte 2000: 11) in part by outlawing the disposal of shit into streets and other public spaces. In the specific context of France, Laporte argued, the state was able to mold subjects into private individuals while establishing its power over the whole of society by linking the development of private property and commerce to the displacement of dirt to the private domain.

1.1.2 Capitalism's Remainder

Given their analytical focus on the social and/or personal boundaries that separate the clean from the unclean, the various authors above have primarily emphasized the spatial dimension of dirt making. The production of dirt effectively appears in their work as an (often transhistorical) effect of order building – state, society and/or subject formation—while its embrace tends to be construed as fundamentally transgressive and even liberatory.

By contrast, a number of scholars have paid attention to the temporality of dirt, linking in so doing the production and accumulation of human and material waste worldwide to the operations of capitalism. Here waste is construed, not as the byproduct of symbolic and cognitive structures or as a threat to the social orders in place, but as the remainder of the cycle of capital accumulation, or, in Gay Hawkins's evocative words (2006: vii), as the "shit end of capitalism." More generally, it is apprehended in this literature as a fetish, i.e. as a commodity which simultaneously conceals and reveals the core contradictions of capitalism.

Authors that construe dirt as capitalism's remainder can be split schematically into two groups, each focusing on a different moment of the cycle of capital accumulation. Essentially composed of environment scholars, the first group is concerned with *consumption* and the material waste it generates. Writing mainly

from a Marxist perspective, the second group privileges *production* and addresses capitalism's excretion of the human as waste. A key figure in this literature is of course Marx himself, who showed in *Capital* (1977) how the disposability of labor is essential to the operations of capitalism, and this in two fundamental ways. First, he noted, a significant portion of workers in capitalism are discarded into unemployment or underemployment to form the 'reserve army of labor,' at which point they can be used as strikebreakers or reabsorbed into wage labor and then expelled again in accordance with the needs of capital. On the other hand, since labor is both an expendable factor of production and the source of value under capitalism, the bodies of wage laborers must be used up at ever faster rates for profits to be maximized, until they have no inherent value and can be left behind as waste. As Marx himself wrote: "the more values he creates the more valueless and worthless he becomes, the more formed the product the more deformed the worker" (Marx 1998).

Expanding on Marx's concepts, contemporary authors have argued that human disposability under neoliberal capitalism has led to the production of surplus populations that have become structurally redundant to processes of accumulation. Thus, Mike Davis (2006) has explored how supernumerary populations that may never even engage in wage labor are symptomatic of capitalism's contradictions today. In turn, Moishe Postone (1993) and the *Werkkritik* school have argued that the generation of (surplus) value is simultaneously a devaluation and a wasting away of humans laborers as these transfer their value into the commodities they produce. They regard the accumulation of human waste not merely as the remainder of a production process that expends labor in the search for profits, but as a pre-condition

for the reproduction of capitalist relations. Most importantly, they consider that the production of surplus populations in our current moment is not conjunctural as it was during the Great depression, but structural. In short, they fully historicize the production of human waste. Lastly, Michelle Yates (2011) has argued that the wasting away of workers' bodies, the formation of a reserve army of labor, and the production of permanent surplus populations should be viewed not as separate phenomena, but as different forms of excretion of the human-as-waste.

1.1.3 Reading Dirt Dialectically

As this review of the literature illustrates, authors writing on dirt have for the most part privileged either its spatial dimensions—unveiling the links between dirt/abjection and the constitution of social orders—or its temporal ones—presenting waste as capitalism's remainder. While they each provided important insights into the problematic of dirt making, I contend that their different (and partial) accounts are insufficient for a proper understanding of Marseille's dirt predicament.

On the one hand, insofar as they treat the boundaries that underpin the constitution of abject spaces and bodies primarily as an effect of cultural or epistemological constructs, space-based accounts are mostly unable to address waste as a historically produced, material artifact. As such they miss how the spatial differentiations that sustain clean/unclean dichotomies are themselves produced via processes of capital accumulation. They then end up displaying what Noel Castree (2009) refers to as “spatial fetishism” or “spatial separatism,” by which they unquestioningly reproduce the reified and fragmented landscape of capitalist society.

On the other hand, time-based accounts—which prevail in much of the Marxist literature—have generally failed to examine how the spaces in which waste

or value accumulate are hierarchically articulated *and* produced through capitalist social relations. To be sure, some authors have examined how dirt is spatialized, tracing the way surplus populations are pushed to the urban margins or how material waste is placed ‘out of sight’—in or close to areas inhabited by excluded socio-economic groups. Yet by failing to view space as a necessary medium for capitalist reproduction, they end up repeating the gesture of space-based accounts of dirt that treat spatial differences as naturally given. The fetishization and valuation of dirt—of excess and margins—has been the consequence of this.

One author stands apart in the literature on dirt, in that he chose to examine together the spatiality and temporality of waste production and accumulation in capitalist modernity. In *Wasted Lives* (2004), sociologist Zygmunt Bauman explored waste simultaneously as a function of order building *and* economic progress. While Bauman’s joint examination of the two dimensions of dirt-making is a welcome gesture, his failure to articulate space and time dialectically—as a “contradictory unity,” to use Castree’s Marxist terminology (2009)—nonetheless led him to present order building and economic progress as two independent phenomena. Dirt thus appears in his work as a mere *by-product* of modernity, as opposed to an element which is key to the reproduction of capitalist social relations and the constitution of the nation-state form. Not only does Bauman fail to see that state representation and capitalist valuation are deeply imbricated, but he also misses the important point that both are predicated on the abjection and wasting away of human lives.

Studying space and time dialectically is a necessary move, I argue, if one is to grasp the relation that lies at the heart of capitalist modernity between: a) the invisibility/illegibility of off-places in the order of state representation (their

symbolic or epistemological constitution as dirt or abjection) and their devaluation as an effect of capital accumulation (their development as sites of waste proliferation); and b) sites of waste proliferation—off-places—and sites of value accumulation—core places. Most importantly, such a dialectical approach is key because it posits that economic devaluation and spatial relegation are both the result *and* the precondition for capitalism's movement of creative destruction.

Throughout my dissertation, I address the spatial and temporal dimensions of dirt dialectically as I explore the city of Marseille, as well as the experiences and political practices of *sans papiers* who live and work in the city. In this chapter, I specifically investigate the past and present landscape of Marseille through the categories of space and time, paying close attention to how these latter have been dialectically articulated in the constitution of the city. In the next chapter, I continue to focus on Marseille's spatio-temporality as I examine how the city has been transformed through the implementation of *Euroméditerranée*, but also how urban regeneration has relied, in turn, on the labor of *sans papiers* who live and hide in the city. In chapter 3, I specifically focus on *sans papiers*'s experiences of space-time, and more specifically on the spatio-temporal void to which they are being increasingly confined owing to urban enclosure and the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders. Lastly, in chapter 4, I provide a dialectical account of the political subjectivation of *sans papiers*—capitalist modernity's abjectified beings *par excellence*—as these attempt to reconfigure the urban and global common by effecting a rupture in neoliberal space-time.²⁹

²⁹ I show in chapter 5 that this process of political subjectivation goes far beyond the mere transgression of boundaries via the embrace of dirt.

1.2 An Off-Place Of Capitalist Modernity

The city begins with asylum.
Jules Michelet
Histoire Romaine
1833

*The hospitable city is a new world made from the remnants of old worlds:
It contains and purifies them.*³⁰

Jules Michelet
Origines du Droit Français
1837

1.2.1 The City Begins with Asylum

The founding legend of Marseille is a story of asylum, as well as a story of love between a foreign man and a native woman. 2,600 years ago, a young Phocian prince named Protis was travelling the Mediterranean sea when he came upon the Bay of Lacydon,³¹ a remarkable site fed by a fresh water stream and protected by two natural outcrops. Seduced by the beauty of the cove, Protis decided to build a trading outpost and went inland to meet the native tribes. The local Ligurian chief gave hospitality to the young foreign prince, and invited him to a banquet he was holding for the suitors who hoped to marry his daughter Gyptis. At the banquet, Gyptis fell in love with Protis, and offered him the ceremonial cup of wine to indicate she had elected him as her husband to be. Protis and Gyptis married and moved to the hill north of the Bay of Lacydon; from their initial settlement grew the city of *Massalia*, later to be known by the name of Marseille (Contrucci and Duchêne 1999).

³⁰ My translations.

³¹ The Old Port, around which the center of the city is laid out, is located in the Bay of Lacydon.

The story of Gyptis and Protis is merely a legend, yet it fully conveys the peculiarity of the so-called Phocæan city: that it was born, not at the heart of the future nation, but at its border, at the threshold between here and elsewhere. The millennial history of Marseille was undeniably shaped by this liminality, which linked the city to the Mediterranean sea as much as to the European continent, and made it the home of several men and women in exile. Throughout Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Marseille was largely built through commercial and cultural exchanges with different peoples of the Mediterranean.

As the French state began to consolidate itself, the city's liminal position on the Mediterranean border and the autonomy of its inhabitants proved threatening to the powers in place. Marseille was thus gradually construed as a defiant and barbarian place in need of control and purification. Three key historical events of the early modern period testify to these developments. In 1666, in response to a local uprising, King Louis XIV commissioned the building of Fort St-Pierre at the Old Port entrance, and asked that cannons be directed not towards the outside, against a potential threat from abroad, but towards the inside, against the city's unruly inhabitants. Equally wary of Marseillais' renowned indiscipline, Cleric P. Giraud remarked in 1709 on the function of these peculiar cannons: "Fort and galley cannons are pointed at the city, and officers are ordered to shoot at first sign of trouble: in this manner we can contain the convicts who have threatened to revolt and join the rabble in order to prey on the rich and ravage the city" (my translation, 1709 cited in Dell'Umbria 2006). In 1720, when an epidemic of bubonic plague entered Marseille via a French ship returning from the Levant, blockades were erected around the city to save the souls of the sick and simultaneously contain the

foreign-borne disease. The threshold of Marseille was then confirmed as a vector of dirt, disease and death, and indeed as an amorphous space whose inhabitants had to be immobilized and tamed in a process of purification that merged religious imagery with nascent secular reason.³² Finally, in 1794, Parisian Jacobins occupied the Mediterranean port-city, deposed local authorities, and renamed Marseille *la ville sans nom* (the city with no name), as punishment for having rebelled against the newly formed Republican government. Thus, at the height of revolutionary fervor, the city was deprived of political autonomy and pushed outside the realm of representation for a period of ten years. These various political techniques of spatial enclosure and symbolic erasure confirm that Marseille developed in the early modern period on the margins of the emerging French state.

1.2.2 *A Port Awash with Human Waste*

While the city's complex relationship with France was clearly a function of its liminality, Marseille's development in the modern period was also tied to the rise of imperial capitalism, which was of course integral to the building of the modern French state. Given its strategic position on the Mediterranean, Marseille turned into a key hub of the French colonial empire. Construed as 'the door to the colonies,' the Mediterranean city became at once the point of departure for France's colonial expansion, and the entry point for colonial immigrants. While Marseille's elites made fortunes out of the colonial enterprise, the city nevertheless remained

³² It is perhaps no coincidence that the Marseille-born founder of surrealist *Théâtre de la cruauté*, Antonin Artaud, mentioned the 1720 epidemic when he discussed the homology between the excess of madness and the irrationality of the plague (see Artaud 1964). Note that Artaud himself spent nine years of his life in a mental institution.

subordinate to the centralized French state, and its population was still composed primarily of the working classes.

During and after the colonial period, different waves of exiles washed up and sedimented in the center of the port-city. And each one of these waves was directly or indirectly the result of capitalism's expansion worldwide. From the impoverished Greeks and Italians who settled en masse in the nineteenth century; the Armenians, White Russians and Spanish Republicans who found political refuge and the colonial subjects who found work on the port-city docks in the first decades of the twentieth; the European Jews who fled extermination during WWII; the Algerians and Pieds Noirs who crossed over the sea at decolonization; all the way to the Sub-Saharan African and Comorian political and/or economic refugees who have been arriving in ever greater numbers, men and women born in faraway places were forced into exile and settled in Marseille largely because of the creative destruction brought on the world by capital's logic. And it is, to paraphrase Bauman, this 'human waste of modernity' that has shaped the social and cultural landscape of the Mediterranean port-city to this day.

Marseille and its port also became the site where colonial subjects and destitute Europeans came together as the refuse of capitalist modernity. As such, the racial hierarchies born of colonialism were often subverted. Thus, while national elites were explicitly racist at that time, more troubling to them than the presence of colonial subjects in the city center seemed to be the continuous mingling of dark and white bodies on the docks and around the Old Port. Intimate relations between locals and foreigners, and especially between local women and foreign men proved particularly worrisome to the French bourgeoisie. In her 1844 writings on the city,

novelist Flora Tristan made this particularly clear: “If I were to become a servant of the French nation, I do not know what I would decide for the city of Marseille, but I would certainly not keep this jumble of bankrupt Jews and Arabs and these throngs of public women, courtesans of these barbarians” (my translation, cited in Dell’Umbria 2006). Arguably, it was this illegible jumble, this undoing of racial and national boundaries at France’s southern edge that most contributed to Marseille’s reputation as a city of dirt. Such boundary crossings seemed indeed like matter out of place, and it was to restore the line between the clean and the unclean that countless projects of urban renewal were devised in the port-city—the 1942 demolition of the Old Port quarter being the most spectacular among these.



Figure 1.4: Abject Body Mingling #1
Author Unknown - Old Postcard (Early 1900s)



Figure 1.5: Abject Body Mingling #2
Photo by László Moholy-Nagy (1929)



Figure 1.6: Abject Body Mingling #3
Photo by Baudelaire (1925)

In fact, the jumble of unwashed bodies that toiled on the port-city docks turned out to be a most fertile terrain for revolutionary activities. Political organizing by the French Communist Party (PCF) proved particularly potent in the early twentieth century in bringing together exploited workers who had come to the city from faraway lands. The PCF has a long and important history in Marseille,³³ and

³³ From the 1950s to the 1980s, the PCF was the most successful political party in Marseille, receiving up to 34% of the popular vote. Yet it never took over City Hall as the other parties

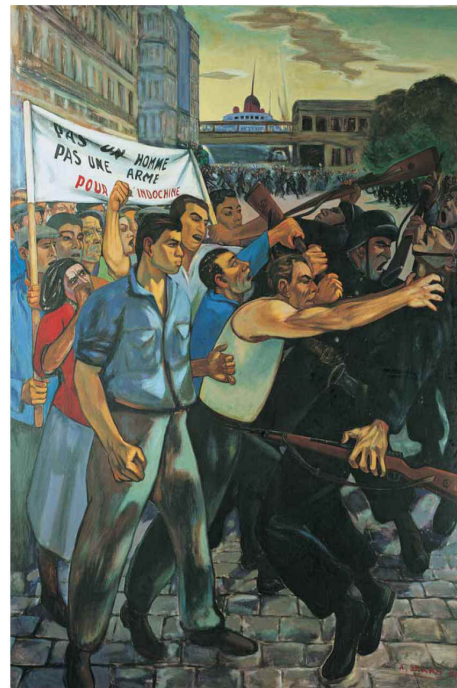
though it was certainly not immune to racializing its (post)colonial members, it recruited massively among the city's dockworkers, and promoted as such forms of solidarity that did subvert the lines of race and nation.³⁴

Particularly outstanding was the strike of 1950. Triggered by dockworkers' blockage of the weapons shipment to Asia to protest against France's imperialist war in Indochina (and in particular to oppose the dismissal of 800 workers who had refused to participate in the war effort), the strike led to the unions' 40-day shutdown of the port. The solidarities forged between the working classes of Europe and those of the colonies proved abhorrent to the powers in place at the time, for they threatened both the imagined purity of France and the material interests of the national bourgeoisie. Hence the history of the international working-class movement in Marseille was deliberately erased from France's collective memory. Paul Carpita's film '*Le rendez-vous des quais*,' which told in fictional terms the story of the 1950 dockworkers' strike, was censored for decades before it finally became

were able to form a greater coalition to prevent its access to power. See Peraldi et Samson (2005).

³⁴ Historians Yael Fletcher-Simpson (2003) and Mary Dewhurst Lewis (2007) have shown that colonial workers were racialized on Marseille's docks during the interwar period, including by Communist Party organizers. However, others have argued (see Dell'Umbria 2006) that this process of racialization affected not only the *indigènes*, but also the Southern Italians, Spaniards and Greek workers who were violently rejected when they first came to the city (e.g., the anti-Italian pogroms that took place in Marseille in the late nineteenth century). On the contradictions of the PCF's position towards imperialism and foreign workers, see (cite).

available to the French public in 1989.



La lettre des dockers à Marseille contre la guerre d'Indochine, huile sur toile, A. Serra, 1950, 200 x 200 cm, coll. Espace culturel Paul-Ricard, cédité J. Serra © ADAGP

***Figure 1.7: Marseille's International Working Class vs. Imperial France
Painting by Antoine Serra (1950)***

1.2.3 Waking from Modern Dreams

The economic decline of Marseille after decolonization was abrupt and violent in its effects. Having been the privileged port of the colonial empire in the interwar years, from the 1960s onwards Marseille lost the markets that had been secured for it by protectionist policies. As the city's economy (and especially the port) collapsed, industry went from employing 27% of the workforce in 1954 to employing only 19% in 1975 (Dell'Umbria 2012). In the last 50 years, Marseille has been in the grip of a severe economic crisis, with unemployment rates being among the highest in France. While Marseille was always a city of proletarians, it seems to

be the home today of important surplus populations.

In this context, the far-right Front National party has slowly replaced the PCF (French Communist Party) as the party of choice among the white working-class. Several racist murders were recorded in the 1970s in Marseille, prompting observers to view the city as a hotbed of fascist ideologues. It seems that just as the dream of empire came to an end, so did the communist one of international solidarity. The neoliberal period has indeed put an end to modern dreams, and the awakening has left a bitter taste in the mouths of many Marseillais.

Today, those whose skin is a little darker, even those who do have work, find that they are increasingly pushed to the margins of the city. Segregation seems to be on the rise, just as traditional working-class solidarities are gradually eroding. From the 1970s onwards, the image of Marseille in the national media has been that of a city in the grip of unemployment, poverty and corruption, as the cliché describing it as ‘the Chicago of France’ attests. Marseille never had a good reputation, but now it seems to have no future at all.

1.3 Boundary Failure

Look at this... Marseille is an open-sky asylum!

Commentary of a friend
as he contemplated the human wrecks
drifting around the *Cours Julien*

1.3.1 Margins at the Center

Situated on the Mediterranean shore, south of the north and north of the south, the city of Marseille seems to belong nowhere and everywhere at once. Its contemporary landscape doubtless reveals its position as a nameless threshold, a land of asylum for much of modernity’s human waste. In the dirt-laden streets of the

urban center, myriad traces recall the successive waves of exiles that washed up and found refuge in the blinding sun, settling temporarily or permanently in the impoverished areas surrounding the Old Port. Most strikingly, Marseille remains oriented to this day towards the sea, towards the memory and promise of elsewhere.

Given Marseille's history as crossroads and refuge, as an off-place of modernity that welcomed several of the world's castaways, approximately half of its current inhabitants can trace their roots to North or Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East or East Asia, while those of European origin rarely define themselves as true *français de souche* (of full-fledged French ancestry).³⁵ In my conversations with Marseillais from various walks of life, I found that the majority have mixed backgrounds, with a number claiming that each of their four grandparents was born in a different southern and/or northern country. My fieldwork disclosed moreover that though the border between north and south effectively—and often violently—traverses the city, it is being transgressed daily in multiple spaces of contact, which range from public and work spaces to the intimate spaces in which friendship, love and family bonds unfold. As I will now turn to show, the city's unique configuration simultaneously reflects and enables such boundary crossings.

While the port area long served as the main landing site for the countless exiles that had come from the sea, the northern zone has become home in the last forty years to the poorest populations of the border-city.³⁶ Today, not only is the

³⁵ See Blanchard (2005). Since statistics based on race are illegal in France, such estimates are usually calculated by asking people the name of the country their parents were born in.

³⁶ The poorest neighborhood of Marseille today is *La Belle de Mai* - and this in spite of the recent construction in the area of *La Friche*, a renowned art factory largely divorced from its

landscape of the northern districts scattered with a number of bleak *cités* (social housing estates), but in many of these white residents have come to form a small minority.³⁷ The border that separates Europe from its geographical and cultural others has thus been reproduced via a split between the impoverished (and darker) northern zone and its wealthy (and lighter) southern counterpart.

Yet in spite of the north-south axis that now splits the city in two, there are no *banlieues* to speak of in the Mediterranean city. The northern zone is an integral part of the urban agglomeration, which in administrative terms is twice as large as Paris. Thus, unlike in Paris, where *banlieues* residents are situated outside the Ile-de-France district (i.e. Paris *intramuros*), those who live in the poorest districts of the northern zone are official residents of Marseille. Moreover, in contrast to Parisian *banlieusards*, they can access the center fairly easily. Jocelyne Cesari et al. (2001) observed that postcolonial youths of the northern districts circulate in central areas as easily as young whites from the southern zone. In my own research on *métissage* (intercultural and interracial mixing) in Marseille, I found that key spaces of the urban center³⁸ constitute important rallying points for impoverished (white and non-

social environment. Located just north of the city center, *La Belle de Mai* is increasingly inhabited by Roma Gypsies and Comorians, and is also home to a large population of *sans papiers* who live in abandoned *cités* at the mercy of unscrupulous *marchands du sommeil* (exploitative landlords).

³⁷ Dell'umbria (2006) notes that the division between the southern and northern zones of the city occurred during the 33-year reign of socialist mayor Gaston Defferre. Note that economic indicators for the northern zone are particularly bleak today.

³⁸ Notably *Rue St-Ferréol*, *Fort St-Pierre*, *Centre Bourse*, *plage des Catalans*, etc.

white) youths residing in the northern and central districts. Clearly, such relationship to space makes for more frequent social interactions across racial and cultural lines.

In addition, and this is a crucial point, Marseille remains the last city in France (and one of the last in Europe) in which the downtown area is occupied mainly by the working classes, including a large concentration of migrants of various origins.³⁹ Despite local authorities' repeated (and only partly successful) attempts at transforming Marseille's socio-cultural landscape, the heart of the city still largely beats to the rhythm of coarse black, brown and (off)white bodies. Most strikingly, the white bourgeoisie is hardly visible in key areas of the urban center, as if the boisterous men and women who live there had managed to keep the wealthy at bay. Preferring to reside south of the Old Port, along the beaches of the *Prado* or atop the hill of *Roucas Blanc*, the well-to-do go downtown for work or for business, but generally fear entering the poorest (and largely African) neighborhoods of *Noailles* and *Belsunce*. And if by chance they choose to walk the streets of those 'abject' spaces, they do so with considerable discretion.

³⁹ Unlike in the United States, city outskirts in France today are poor and largely inhabited by first or second-generation migrants, while urban centers are occupied for the most part by the middle and upper classes. Marseille constitutes a notable exception to this urban configuration.



Figure 1.8: Undesirable Youth At Play in the City Center
Photo by Michel Ayello (2013)

1.3.2 An Impossible Appropriation

The spatial configuration of Marseille is thus characterized by the important presence and (mostly unfettered⁴⁰) circulation of undesirable bodies in its urban center—a presence which, I contend, is symptomatic of boundary failure at Europe’s southern edge. Such failure is explained in part by the city’s peculiar history, namely its development on the margins of the centralized French state and its function as a

⁴⁰ It bears emphasizing that the circulation of undesirables in the city center is not entirely free. The police do carry out identity controls, which principally target Roma gypsies and young men of African origin. Nevertheless, the circulation of abject bodies is arguably easier in Marseille’s center than it is in any other city of France, both because of the sheer number of poor, marginal and/or non-white people residing in the area, and because of the state’s inability to exert full control over the city’s inhabitants.

nodal point in the French colonial enterprise. But it can be fully elucidated only by exploring as well the intricate and intimate manner in which Marseillais have come to interact with the spaces of their unique city.

One striking aspect of this interaction is the way in which the city, and especially its center, has made room for men and women of every origin without being appropriated by any cultural group in particular. If Marseille is at once Comorian, Italian, Senegalese, Algerian,⁴¹ Pied Noir, Sephardic, Armenian, and perhaps even a little French, none of these communities appears to have monopoly on the definition of the city—even though this definition is an obvious point of contention, as the language deployed surrounding *Euroméditerranée* attests. It may be that, as Temime suggests (1997), each wave of migrants having had to share the city center with the one that came next, no cultural norms were able to prevail, and multiple sociabilities and solidarities could form between the different communities that found refuge in the city. I was certainly struck by the practices of cultural *bricolage* in which Marseille's youth engages on a daily basis, with a general openness to difference that would appear to forestall any appeal to homogeneity.

⁴¹ Countless Algerian-born Marseillais have told me that living in Marseille feels just like living in Algiers. Some even consider Marseille to be a province of Algeria, and refer to it as the 49th *wilaya* (Algerian administrative division). Sheila Crane (2008) has written extensively on the correspondence between the two cities, pointing out that the same architects and urban planners were involved in developing their respective urban centers. These architectural similarities, as well as the very high number of North Africans living in the city, have certainly contributed to the impression that Marseille is an extension of Algeria.

Unlike their nineteenth and twentieth century predecessors, several commentators today⁴² praise the cosmopolitanism of ordinary Marseillais.⁴³ Most strikingly, such cosmopolitanism is often said to account for the relative calm that prevailed in the city in 2005, as riots were erupting in *banlieues* of the rest of France.⁴⁴

In my view, the co-existence and intermingling of people from different marginalized communities is explained primarily by the fact that, due to their condition as uprooted and transient migrants, those who settled in Marseille could never fully *appropriate* the spaces of the abject city. It seems indeed as if the castaways of the modern world, despite finding refuge in Marseille and partially

⁴² As analysts (Gastaut 2003) have pointed out, local and national perceptions of Marseillais cosmopolitanism have changed radically in the last twenty years. If the phenomenon once proved threatening to the frontiers of Frenchness, essays, novels, films and cultural events with Marseille-style cultural mixing as their central theme have proliferated since the 1990s, along with a fascination with the worldwide phenomenon itself.

⁴³ A number of critics nevertheless insist that Marseille is not the cosmopolitan paradise it is made out to be, and that various forms of segregation do mark the city landscape. Others point out that *l'autochtonie* (i.e. the fact of being born in Marseille) is an important means of access to power in the Mediterranean city. On the contradictions of Marseille-style cosmopolitanism, see Manry (2002). While these objections are no doubt well founded, I have chosen to focus instead on the countless moments in which the city's boundaries appear to come undone.

⁴⁴ Other hypotheses have been put forward to explain Marseille's relative calm at the height of the riots. The most cynical among these is that drug dealers kept a tight lid on youth of the northern zone at the time, so as to ensure that police would not come and interrupt their lucrative traffic.

remaking its landscape in accordance with their dreams and broken memories, never quite made the city their *own* because neither their past nor their future safely belonged in it. This is no doubt why the racially-mixed (white, black and Arab) local rap band IAM has stressed numerous times Marseille's 'extra-territorial' character—its existence beyond the logic of modern nationhood—by giving their native city the nickname *planète Mars* (planet Mars...eille).

The center of Marseille appears to constitute a veritable common, a space wherein the links between culture and territory are unfixed precisely because the city was constituted as a city in exile. And Marseille's landscape contrasts with that of large metropolises like New York or Paris, which, in spite of their conspicuous cosmopolitanism, remain important centers for the (property-based) enclosure of space. The 'cosmopolitanism from below'⁴⁵ I observed in the Mediterranean city seems accompanied rather by *the impossibility of spatial appropriation*, which translates into the failure of (internal and external) boundaries, as well as the overall impression of an illegible city long overcome with dirt.

1.3.3 Identifying with Dirt

The impossibility of spatial appropriation in Marseille has been accompanied in turn by peculiar (dis)identification processes. Given the permeability of boundaries and the fluidity with which the marginalized can circulate in the common spaces of an urban center construed as abjection, poor Marseillais generally feel that they belong in a city situated on the edge of a nation that persists in denigrating

⁴⁵ Alain Tarrius (2000) uses the expression '*cosmopolitisme d'en bas*' to describe the relations of trust that develop in informal economic networks and help forge bonds between Marseille's different cultural communities.

them. Several commentators (Dell’Umbria 2012, Cesari et al. 2001, Sberna 2001) have observed that impoverished youths have come to claim a Marseillais identity synonymous with being poor, crude, marginal, of foreign or mixed origin... and decidedly un-French. My own research certainly confirmed this assessment. Many of the youths I spoke with expressed their pride in being Marseillais, while also acknowledging their city’s bad reputation and position on the periphery of both France and Europe. For instance, upon hearing of my research project on *métissage*, a young Franco-Comorian woman residing in the poorest housing estate of Marseille (and France for that matter) was both flattered by my interest in her native city and wondered out loud why I wanted to study “*la pourriture*” (rot or scum).

Dell’Umbria (2012) has claimed that Marseille’s identity is to be an object of contempt. I would add that this identity is at its core a non-identity. It would seem, even, that it is precisely because Marseille’s identity is paradoxically a non-identity that generations of human waste could find refuge in this abject city. Marseille, once named the city with no name, seems indeed the name of the nameless. In other words, identification with ‘Marseille’ takes place when those who have been exiled from the world of proper humans come to embrace their own abjection. Therein lies in my view the explanation for Marseillais’ unusual relationship with dirt. Marseillais have embodied the notion that their city is a wasted site, a site where only waste can thrive. As they identify with dirt and its many dangers, they appropriate and revert the stigma that is attached to them and the city they inhabit. Transgressing bourgeois norms, engaging in practices of urban degradation, using filthy language, and throwing garbage everywhere thus become construed as acts of resistance against a nation that has cast them outside the bounds of ‘civilized’

humanity. Boundary failure here stems not from the impossibility of property, but from the *impossibility of 'propreté' (cleanliness) and propriety*—the very norms without which Freud (but also Laporte) claimed no modern subject could come into being.

In sum, in the non-place of Marseille, where state representation (the norms of propriety and *propreté*) and capitalist valuation (the logic of property) fail to prevail, boundaries are fragile and margins are located in the very center. And the illegible, abject mingling of undesirable bodies that ensues is out for everyone to see. The heart of Marseille today seems indeed an open-sky asylum, where *Chibanis*,⁴⁶ unemployed Arab and Black youth, roaming Roma, homeless vagrants, deinstitutionalized mental patients, heroin addicts and middle-aged prostitutes can live and circulate relatively freely,⁴⁷ engaging through complex practices with the various spaces of a city center that has long existed on the social, economic and national margins. And those castaways of the modern world can be seen to interact with each other and with the more normalized inhabitants with a fluidity I have not seen anywhere else on the European continent.

Thus, at *Cours Julien* where I reside,⁴⁸ I have met a number of men and

⁴⁶ *Chibani* means 'white hair' in Arabic. The term is now used in French to refer to old immigrant men from North Africa.

⁴⁷ Though of course, this is less true of *sans papiers* who, as I will show in chapter 4, are increasingly on the lookout for police controls.

⁴⁸ Cours Julien is a medium-sized square located in the city center and scattered with a mixture of North African, Senegalese, Antillean, French, Italian, and Corsican family or upscale restaurants, rundown bars and cafés alongside more fashionable ones, trendy

women who live on the threshold of ‘normality,’ working at times and others not, sleeping outside or in a squat on certain nights and on others at a friend’s house, asking me for money on certain days yet offering me a drink when they have the means to pay. And these people whom the better-off French pejoratively refer to as *cas soc*’ (short for *cas social*, i.e. social case) are an integral part of the neighborhood. They sit and chat at the surrounding cafés, speak with restaurant and shop owners as effective members of the community, and circulate within common spaces as freely as the recently settled bourgeois. I have not deliberately sought the friendship of these men and women. Still, they have come to me, befriended me, included me in their peculiar universe, and engaged with me in their unique brand of ‘cassociality’. Not so long ago, one of Cours Julien’s resident schizophrenic women, stopped and asked me: “*Hé, Madame! T’as pas vu Ralph?*” (“Hey, Madam! Have you seen Ralph?”). Not only did she assume that I knew who Ralph was, but she called me Madam and used the familiar French *tu* in the same sentence. In her

boutiques, underground and large concert halls, a couple of theaters, two children playgrounds, etc. The area has long been considered highly dangerous, yet is now home to a growing bobo population. Though city authorities have pushed for the gentrification of Cours Julien, the square is still covered with dirt and graffiti, and a very high number of undesirables continue living there, or simply come from the adjacent *Noailles* quarter and the nearby psychiatric hospital, to loiter for hours on end. The cast of extra-ordinary and often psychologically challenged characters who have made Cours Julien their home is truly remarkable. I could write an entire book about these various men and women, but I will simply mention the case of this seventy-something indigent white man who regularly walks around the square listening to hip hop on his ghetto blaster to give a sense of the heterotopic quality of this unusual space.

liminal mind, I was both a distant middle-aged woman *and* a part of the gang. I was positioned inside and outside her world all at once, and she positioned herself simultaneously outside and inside what she believed to be mine.

In effect, it is easier to be poor, or foreign, or mad in Marseille. The boundaries between inside and outside, north and south, west and east, and sane and insane certainly do run across the city landscape, yet seem at times indistinguishable. Or rather, they appear to be perpetually on the verge of undoing themselves. It seems as though the great confinement of the classical age, which Foucault (1965) so memorably described, never quite reached completion in this liminal space. As if the borderline between the clean and the unclean was never firmly set, so that no thing and no body is actually quite in its proper place.



***Figure 1.9: Asylum Graffiti:
“Only the ones who have cracked will let the light shine through.
And here, all of us have cracked.”
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2014)***

1.4 Stagnation

- *Do you feel French now that you've been granted French nationality?*
 - *No, not at all.*
 - *Do you feel Algerian?*
 - *No, I don't feel Algerian either.*
 - *Marseillaise?*
 - *Perhaps, yes.*
 - *Why do you feel Marseillaise?*
 - *Because Marseille doesn't belong to anyone:*
The city is for everyone, for people who come here, settle down, and then leave.
 - *Would you leave Marseille one day?*
 - *Yes, of course, if the opportunity presented itself.*
 - *And where would you go?*
 - *I don't know. Anywhere I guess.*

Excerpts from a conversation with Nadia
after she was just granted French nationality

1.4.1 Transient Refuse

Georg Simmel (1971) once wrote that the stranger is he who, even though he has chosen not to move on, has not abandoned the freedom to leave and come back as he pleases. Like many other Marseillais I have come to know over the years, Nadia seems to me to be such a stranger. After eighteen years spent living in the liminal port-city (including ten living as a *sans papiers*), she is very bitter at France and still angry at Algeria. Yet she is at peace with Marseille, which is neither one nor the other, though of course it is also a little bit of both. In my conversations with her, I have come to understand that she lets herself be Marseillaise because this is to her a transient state. Marseille is a more comfortable place to be in because she knows that she can always leave.... and return... if the opportunity presents itself.

Nadia, like several men and women I have come to know in Marseille, lives in the time of transience. The city of dirt may be her home now, but it is not her final destination. "The journey that does not find its destination point becomes the non-

place in which exile begins,”⁴⁹ writes Agier (2011b: 21). Nadia seems to me to be dwelling in the time of exile.

When I first came to Marseille in 2007, long before I befriended Nadia, I met Simmel’s strangers for the very first time. After losing myself in the vicinity of *Porte-d’Aix* (Marseille’s filthy answer to Paris’s *Arc de Triomphe*), I wrote the following entry in my personal diary:

I am walking in circles around the disreputable Arc. I have joined the flow of bodies, the dreamy trail of strangers and invisible men that circulate around the Arc like blood feeding a wounded city heart. But I forget why, when or how I have entered this circle of exile. For a circle has neither beginning nor end. I do not know when to stop, nor how to leave.

On that memorable day, I let the blinding Mediterranean sun caress my ice-cold skin,⁵⁰ and fell in love with the city of dirt. I entered the trail of strangers, and I have not been able to escape the wounded city heart ever since. I have embraced the disorienting pace of life among modernity’s refuse, in a city where boundaries between inside and outside, north and south, west and east, and sane and insane so easily come undone.⁵¹ I have joined the trail of strangers that do not fix or appropriate the different spaces of the city. Home is in the circle of exile, in the

⁴⁹ My translation.

⁵⁰ I am Canadian!

⁵¹ Marc Scialom’s remarkable 1969 film, *Lettre à la prison*, tells the story of a young Tunisian who comes to Marseille to rescue his brother incarcerated for a crime he did not commit. As he slowly wanders through the fluid spaces of the threshold city, the young man loses his bearings, and eventually his sanity. I have often wondered if the high number of mentally ill people circulating in the city center could be explained by a similar experience of exile, and by the disorientation that comes with crossing such porous boundaries.

myriad boundary-crossings, and in the infinite possibilities to leave and then come back again.

Many of the transient refuse in Marseille are ordinary small-time traders, hustlers, roaming Romas, or simply *sans papiers*. They endure in a city which some have claimed was forsaken by God,⁵² selling shoes, fabrics, household appliances, stolen goods, drugs, or whatever they can rummage through the trash bins. Theirs is a survival economy embedded in larger capital flows; but it is also a capitalism from below that has largely contributed to Marseille's reputation as a city of dirt.⁵³

Much of this economy of the refuse occurs daily in *Marché du Soleil* (Sun Market), which is located right by *Porte d'Aix* and another 50 meters away from Saint-Charles train station. Given the proximity of this informal market, *Porte d'Aix* presents a remarkable scene: a Mediterranean *Arc de Triomphe* overcome with the refuse of capitalist modernity. Interestingly, the French who come to Marseille by

⁵² While many believe that Marseille is a city forsaken by God, several others claim that all of the city's residents, regardless of religion or origin, are protected by *La Bonne Mère*—i.e., the large statue of the Madonna and child which overlooks the city from atop the highest hill in the city center.

⁵³ Both Alain Tarrius (2002) and Michel Peraldi (2002) have written extensively about the bazar economy that has long thrived in Marseille. They describe how migrant entrepreneurs—which Tarrius refers to as 'ants'—have traded in a wide range of consumption goods across the Mediterranean below the radar of tax controls, while operating mainly on the basis of trust relationships. Both refer to this process as 'globalization from below' (*mondialisation par le bas*).

car must exit the highway at *Porte d'Aix*.⁵⁴ In turn, North Africans who migrate to France by boat first land at Marseille's Port, usually walk up the hill to *Porte d'Aix* with their suitcase in hand, and then enter Saint-Charles station to board a train to Paris or another northern city. *Porte d'Aix*, then, is the French's entry point into Marseille and the Mediterranean; it is also North Africans' entry point into Marseille and the European continent. It is a hub, a filthy hub to be sure, but one that intimately connects Algeria to France and then Europe to Africa, without being located in either of these.

1.4.2 Disrupted Flows

According to Bauman,

Rubbish collectors are the unsung heroes of modernity. Day in day out, they refresh and make salient again the borderline between normality and pathology, health and illness, the desirable and the repulsive, the accepted and the rejected, the *comme il faut* et *comme il ne faut pas*, the inside and the outside of the human universe (2004: 28).

Bauman's statement undoubtedly applies to the core places of capitalist modernity. But in Marseille, rubbish collectors do not willingly embrace the status of hero. They tend to neglect that borderline between the clean and the unclean necessary for the social order to remain in place. Truth be told, they would rather follow the official municipal policy of '*fini parti*' ('gone when done'), thanks to which they can leave work as soon as they feel they have completed their daily cleaning job, being paid for seven hours of work while doing only three or four.

⁵⁴ That the first thing French tourists see when they enter Marseille by car is the filthy *Porte d'Aix* is a source of tremendous anxiety for city elites.

They are known to be particularly unrigorous when it comes to cleaning the city's central quarters. Rumor has it that they are encouraged in this by local officials who hope for the area's complete degradation, so that its abject residents may pack their dirty things and leave at last.⁵⁵ I sometimes see the neighborhood's garbage collectors drink *pastis* at open-air cafés in the afternoon, while the streets are still unclean and filthy plastic bags are flying in the Mistral wind.



Figure 1.10: Garbage Collectors on Break
Photo by Michel Ayello (2014)

Yet the most spectacular failure of boundary maintenance I have ever observed occurred when Marseille's unsung heroes of modernity decided to go on strike to protest the government's latest pension reform plan. In the fall of 2010,

⁵⁵ For a review of the politics of garbage collection in Marseille, see Peraldi and Samson (2005).

garbage collectors stopped picking up rubbish for a period of two weeks, allowing for capitalism's material waste to explode with a vengeance and entirely deface the Mediterranean city. Overflowing trash bins, mountains of filth, blocked entrance doors, unspeakable smells, freely roaming rats... such was the lot of Marseillais until the state threatened to send in the army if garbage collectors did not immediately return to work. This was indeed a matter of national emergency, for as waste piled up in every corner of the city, Marseille's economy came to a complete stop.



***Figure 1.11: The Garbage Collectors Strike #1
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2010)***



***Figure 1.12: The Garbage Collectors Strike #2
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2010)***



***Figure 1.13: The Garbage Collectors Strike #3
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2010)***

The power of garbage men in blocking capital and commodity flows was unmistakable during those two memorable weeks. The strike certainly revealed how fragile boundaries are in the city of dirt, but also how shaky the grounds of capitalism are at the edge of Europe.⁵⁶ For insofar as it is fuels creative destruction,

⁵⁶ There is in fact a long tradition of striking in Marseille, and this in domains not necessarily connected to dirt. Dockers, in particular, go on strike frequently, so much so that

capitalism does not merely create; it also destroys. It creates piles and piles of rubbish wherever it traces its path. And this rubbish must circulate as much as the objects it creates, lest the system collapse. In Marseille, where so many people share an intimacy with dirt, waste is frequently left to accumulate, its circulation hindered. Capitalism's logic of value seems to be always on the verge of undoing itself in the city of dirt.⁵⁷

Marseillais, then, may choose the path of the transient refuse, furtively crossing the porous boundaries that separate north from south, east from west, or sane from insane. Or they can go on strike, block capital flows, and let the waste pile up. Either way, they undermine the boundaries that separate the *comme il faut* from the *comme il ne faut pas*, and the inside from the outside of the human universe. Dwelling as they do in city of dirt, they effectively constitute the ob-scene of capitalism's promise of clean, smooth, and unbridled consumption.

1.4.3 Glanditude, or, the Art of Producing Nothing

In addition to transience and blockage, Marseillais can enter a third type of temporality: *glanditude*, or, the art of producing nothing. Difficult to convey to a non-French speaking audience, the verb '*glander*' refers mainly to the practice of

the well-to-do often accuse them of being responsible for the decline of Marseille's port and maritime economy.

⁵⁷ Marseillais also like to recount that, in 2003, their city was candidate for the organization of the America's Cup (a race between sailing yachts), but that a two-week long garbage collectors strike prompted the horrified Swiss organizers to hold the events in Valencia (Spain) instead.

stretching time, while ‘*glanditude*’ is the essential attitude of he/she who ‘*glande.*’ More than the other two temporalities, glanditude entails the refusal of temporal enclosure, and of what Edward P. Thompson (1967) referred to as ‘time discipline.’



Figure 1.14: Glandeurs Young and Old
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2014)

According to Thompson, the industrial revolution brought about a radical transformation in the way time was lived and perceived. What had previously been experienced as a common temporal flow, marked by the movement of seasons and biological necessities, was suddenly split into concrete units at once quantitatively heterogeneous and qualitatively homogeneous. As Thompson insisted, clock time was essential to the formation of both industrial capitalism and the modern state. Most importantly, with clock time came the awareness that time is money: a limited commodity that could no longer be wasted.

Yet in Marseille, time—as almost everything else—is constantly being wasted. People love to ‘*glander.*’ There may be several explanations to this. Many

people are unemployed or underemployed in Marseille,⁵⁸ and a very large number live off welfare benefits with a little (usually undeclared) job on the side. Precarious employment in the informal economy means that people must wait for work, while making themselves available at a moment's notice, and hence oscillating between long periods of idleness and unpredictable moments of intense activity. And then there is that long Marseillais tradition of temporal indiscipline, in which one does not feel obligated to show up on time at an appointment, or even to show up at all. But the most potent explanation, in my view, lies in the fact that Marseille being an off-place of capitalist modernity, time was never divided into measurable and profitable parts here, just as space was never properly confined or partitioned.⁵⁹ Dirt, precisely, is never divided or partitioned.

The residents of the city do seem to have a lot of time on their hands. And so they chat at open air cafés, at the corner store, in the streets, or on the few remaining benches that the city has to offer.⁶⁰ Never in a rush, they '*glandent*,' producing nothing, and feeling quite comfortable with their own indolence. A real sociality of

⁵⁸ The overall unemployment rate in Marseille is 13 %. In the poorest neighborhoods, it approaches 40% among youth.

⁵⁹ In many ways, Marseillais do not construe time as money because money is not their priority. Going into a store or a restaurant is always a humbling experience for a North American consumer: The owner is really not that interested in your money, and so will likely completely ignore you until you leave the premises. The other possibility of course is that the store will be closed when it is supposed to be open, because the owner has better things to do than to attend to your consumer needs on that particular day.

⁶⁰ City authorities have effectively removed most of the benches in the city center, in order to prevent the idle from wasting too much time sitting around in the sun.

the abject (a ‘cassociality’) seems to subsist in the city, wherein dreams are still shared because no partitioning of time has yet begun to play people against one another.

Yet this indiscipline is not necessarily marked by joy. The reality is that most Marseillais—be they employed or not—are desperately trying to make ends meet, struggling to get by, grabbing whatever crumbs fall off the capital and commodity flows that manage to circulate through the stagnant city. Idleness, then, is also an effect of the crisis. Many Marseillais complain about the fact that the city is dragging them down to the bottom of a ceaseless pit. Stuck as they are in the present of immediate survival, they cannot envision a future beyond the here and now.

More to the point, Marseillais seem immersed in the muck of daily existence. As such, stagnation would stem from the fact that all individual energies are wasted trying to escape from this impossible muck. In the infinite movement of capital, Marseillais seem increasingly sacrificed. As a friend of mine once put it, Marseille has become a carnivorous city that is devouring its own offspring. As I will now turn to show, urban redevelopment in the city of dirt has largely contributed to this state of affairs.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored Marseille’s spatio-temporal landscape both past and present. After having reviewed some of the main theories on dirt, abjection and waste, I tried to account for the overwhelming presence of waste in Marseille, as well as for the city’s association with dirt and its many dangers in the French imagination. I argued that owing to its liminal position on the edge of Europe and to the role it played as a key node in the French empire, Marseille emerged as an off-

place of capitalist modernity in which human and material waste have accumulated over time. I then turned to examining Marseille's contemporary spatio-temporal configuration, and saw that the important presence of dirt in the Mediterranean city is symptomatic of boundary failure and temporal stagnation at Europe's southern edge.

Overall, my investigation showed that, until very recently, abject bodies have circulated with relative ease in Marseille, whereas capital and commodity flows have encountered recurrent friction. Thus Marseille appears as one of the rare European cities in which the spatio-temporal common has been relatively well preserved, and has indeed thrived in the form of dirt. As such, the city comes in marked contrast with the core places of modernity in which the norms of *propreté* (cleanliness), propriety and property have long prevailed.

Nevertheless, because dirt exceeds and threatens both capital and the state, urban and national elites in France have longed to clean up the Mediterranean city by (re-) splitting the common into legible, manageable and profitable parts. A large-scale project of urban renewal—*Euroméditerranée*—was launched twenty years ago in Marseille with the goal of doing just that. In the next chapter, I explore how *Euroméditerranée* has gradually transformed the liminal port-city by pushing human and material waste from Marseille's center to the urban periphery, thereby propelling the stagnant port-city into the time of neoliberal postmodernity. I also examine how *sans papiers* have been key to this process of urban renewal, both as targets of *Euroméditerranée*'s cleansing operations and as an overexploited undocumented labor force.

CHAPTER 2

URBAN ENCLOSURE AND THE NEW IMMIGRATION REGIME

*We are... how can I put it? The plastic surgeons of metropolises...
We eradicate excrescences.
Old wrinkles will be erased to infuse youth and life.
Thanks to us, the nature [...] of this city will change.*⁶¹

Urban developer
in Robert Guédiguian's 2000 fiction film
La ville est tranquille

One of the filmmakers who most compellingly painted Marseille is undoubtedly Robert Guédiguian. Born in the city of an Armenian father and a German mother, the proudly communist Guédiguian long crafted poetic and hopeful celebrations of the cosmopolitan solidarity that prevailed among Marseille's working class. In his early works *À la vie, à la mort!*, *Marius et Pierrette*, and *À la place du Coeur*, he filmed a space of conviviality in which the struggles of common women and men were woven together by warmth, labor and hospitality.

In one of his more recent films, *La ville est tranquille* ('The Town is Quiet'), Guédiguian strikes a much more somber note. The same actors have returned, but the city has surrendered to despair. The end of the communist dream, growing unemployment, the severing of social ties and the rise of racist violence have together transformed Marseille into a dystopic landscape. If the town is quiet now, it is because all hope has been silenced.

In *La ville est tranquille*, Guédiguian clearly locates the cause of Marseille's undoing in the urban transformations the city has undergone since the 1990s. One

⁶¹ My translation.

can see in the film greedy entrepreneurs and devious politicians cutting up the center into profitable parts, and turning into irrecoverable waste men and women who not so long ago still had access to the urban common. Though *Euroméditerranée* is never named as such in the film, Guédiguian's critique of the redevelopment operation is unmistakable.

I never knew Marseille as Guédiguian portrayed it in his earlier films. Still, countless Marseillais have told me about the extraordinary life that once animated the poorest quarters of the urban center, before global entrepreneurs and their local political allies undertook to bring prosperity to the Mediterranean city by freeing it of dirt. Some spoke nostalgically of *Belsunce*'s informal and transnational market that attracted shoppers from all over the southern Mediterranean, and that was dismantled in the 1990s by local officials threatened by North Africans' economic success.⁶² Others recalled how the age-old neighborhood of *Le Panier* was home to the poorest, fiercest and raunchiest Marseillais (as well as a notorious den of Corsican and Italian mafias⁶³), before being smothered by hordes of Parisian bobos in search of Mediterranean sun and exoticism. And many described how *Rue de la République*, a kilometer-long Haussmannian boulevard considered until recently to be Europe's biggest squat, saw hundreds of its residents violently expelled by

⁶² For a full description of *Belsunce*'s notorious 'casbah', see Temime (1995).

⁶³ The infamous 'French connection,' which oversaw heroin traffic from Thailand to the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, was primarily composed of Corsican gangsters based in *Le Panier*.

police,⁶⁴ in order to make way for international clothing chains and the city's one and only Starbucks.

For many years, residents, activists, and social scientists claimed that the cleansing operation in Marseille would never actually succeed. Resistance is too strong, they said, and dirt in the center is just unshakable. To be sure, the heart of the city is still inhabited by undesirables, and the white bourgeoisie continues to avoid some of its filthier streets. Yet as Dell'Umbria (2012) remarks, the complete gentrification of Marseille is likely just a matter of time. Most will now concede that the year 2013, which saw the city become the European Capital of Culture, has prompted transformations so radical that the nature of the city may very well have changed.

In my own neighborhood, I can certainly see that the heart of Marseille is being hollowed out. The streets are now cleaner, and a smooth white fountain has replaced the graffiti-covered one in the center of *Cours Julien*. Several trendy bars have opened, surveillance cameras have been placed everywhere, and increasing numbers of hipsters from Europe and beyond are coming to visit or to live in this now happening place. I can no longer hear the cries of H  l  ne, the possibly schizophrenic woman who once called me Madam and used *tu* in the same sentence, for she died of an overdose just a few months ago. Most strikingly, Lamine, Daouda, Timothy, and the other sub-Saharan *sans papiers* I used to discuss with in the children's playground, no longer come around to socialize at night. They now prefer

⁶⁴ The police acted on behalf of ATEMI, a Parisian properties group financed primarily by American and Canadian pension plans.

to meet in the adjacent neighborhood of Noailles, where their black skin blends more easily with that of its mainly non-white inhabitants.

Another important, albeit less visible transformation has in effect occurred along with urban enclosure, one that Guédiguian seems not to have foreseen. Ever since Nicolas Sarkozy's 2005 appointment as Minister of Interior, the number of police controls in Marseille has augmented dramatically. As a result, many of the *sans papiers* who used to circulate with relative ease in different parts of the city center have disappeared from view. Paradoxically, these men and women who now go into hiding have largely contributed to rebuilding Marseille as part of *Euroméditerranée*. While this is only rarely acknowledged, the city's regeneration has effectively relied on the labor of undocumented migrants, often with the tacit approval of state authorities. The urban enclosure so lamented by Guédiguian has thus developed hand in hand with what I term the new immigration regime. This regime, I will now turn to show, entails the production of a large undocumented labor force at the juncture between the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders and the neoliberal reorganization of labor in the informal economy.

In this chapter, I investigate how urban enclosure and this new immigration regime have together transformed the space-time of Marseille, as well as that of undocumented migrants who live and work in the Mediterranean city. **I begin** by reviewing the literature on urban (re)development in global cities, as well as the more recent scholarship on the role played by undocumented labor in neoliberal restructuring, and argue that gentrification and the presence of a large undocumented labor force in cities of the north are mutually constitutive. **Second**, I enquire into *Euroméditerranée*, the large-scale project of urban renewal that has been pushing

human and material waste from Marseille's center to the urban periphery, thereby propelling the stagnant port-city into the time of neoliberal postmodernity. **Third**, I examine how the new immigration regime has facilitated urban regeneration in Marseille, by producing an army of invisible foreign-born workers who have been building and cleaning the new global city while remaining hidden in the flexible underground. **Lastly**, I contend that the constitution of undocumented migrants as 'dirt' to be simultaneously hidden and overexploited has been key to the development of the 'new, dynamic and global' Marseille. I suggest moreover that the underside of proper-tied citizens' current experience of space-time compression in the Mediterranean city is the space-time implosion suffered by this invisible labor force.

2.1 Migrants in the Global City

2.1.1 The (Re)Development of Global Cities

Though the term 'global city' (*ville-monde*) was first coined by historian Fernand Braudel (1979), it is arguably Saskia Sassen who has produced the most influential literature on the topic. According to Sassen (2001), as national borders become deterritorialized, the functions of command and control of the global economy are increasingly located in large cities. Treating size and economic power as defining features, Sassen identified three global cities in the world: New York, London and Tokyo. More recently, scholars have broadened the criteria of what defines a global city (Brenner 2006, Samers 2011), and claimed that any city can be global, provided it functions as a localized node articulated within transnational circuits of capital accumulation, as opposed to being integrated into a national economy.

In recent years, most global cities have sought to transform their urban centers through wide-ranging programs of urban regeneration. Neil Smith has produced important studies on processes of gentrification, and developed the concept of ‘urban revanchism’ (1996) to describe the treatment of urban space as a new frontier, open for conquest with support from the state. Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (2002) have examined how neoliberal restructuring has fueled the privatization and enclosure of common spaces in cities worldwide. In turn, Smith (1982), Harvey (2006) and many others (see Weber 2002) have shown that gentrification and urban enclosure are part of a larger process of uneven development rooted in the structure of capitalism, whereby the common is split between that which has value and that which is devoid of value.

Following Marx who long ago spoke of ‘the annihilation of space through time’ in capitalism, David Harvey (1989) has famously argued that technological developments under post-Fordism have transformed the world, and of course cities, by generating processes of space-time compression. By this, Harvey means acceleration in the pace of life concomitant with the dissolution of traditional spatial co-ordinates. Harvey (1982, 2001) has also examined how urban redevelopment functions through the application of spatial fixes—i.e., spatial techniques of geographical expansion and restructuring—that serve to resolve crises of over-accumulation in capitalism. Bob Jessop (2006) and Noel Castree (2009) have both drawn on Harvey’s work to argue that capitalism solves its inner crises through the application of temporal fixes as well. The latter, they claim, consists in fixed and long-term capital investments, which displace, defer, and defuse crisis-tendencies and contradictions in capitalism. Jessop notes in particular that the spatial and the

temporal fix always operate together, and that they have been key to what Harvey himself has termed the ‘new imperialism.’

2.1.2 Migrants and Neoliberal Restructuring

While Sassen (1988, 2000, 2001) and other global city theorists have examined the role played by foreign labor in shaping global cities, they have generally paid little attention to that played by *undocumented* labor. More recently, scholars (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011; Samers 2002, 2011; Wills et al 2010) have corrected this omission by studying the different ways undocumented migrants have taken part in processes of urban regeneration. In so doing, they have also shown how undocumented migrants themselves have been transformed by the fact of living and working in global cities.

Other scholars (Ali Nobil 2008; Anderson 2010, 2013; Calavitta 2005; Samers 2003, 2011) have specifically investigated the importance of undocumented labor for neoliberal restructuring. They have shown how undocumented migrants have proved a boon to employers because, having no access to labor rights, they are more flexible, tractable and disposable than national or documented workers. They have further explored how, through the development of subcontracting, undocumented workers have come to do the dirty and dangerous work that nationals will not do: cleaning offices, caring for the sick, construction work, etc. Wills et al. (2010), in their study of London, have coined the term ‘new migrant division of labor’ to refer to the fact that, while migrants have long been at the lower echelons of the labor market, global cities are now almost entirely reliant on foreign-born workers. In the specific context of France, scholars (Bernardot 2012, Morice 2010, Moulrier-Boutang 1997) have also paid significant attention to how neoliberal restructuring

has fueled the emergence of a large undocumented labor force. In particular, Claude Valentin-Marie (1996) has made the argument that undocumented workers have served as a testing ground for the neoliberal reorganization of labor practices in the country.

James Anderson (2004) has explained the presence of increasingly large numbers of undocumented workers in cities of the north by a second type of spatial fix. While Harvey's spatial fix entails the export of capital from the core to the peripheries (and so can pertain to imperialism as much as to urban gentrification), Anderson's relies on the import of cheap labor from the periphery to the core. In his view, borders are key to the second spatial fix, because they serve to regulate, cheapen and weaken migrant labor. Anderson claims, moreover, that this fix constitutes a form of 'accumulation by dispossession,' by which migrant workers are allowed into northern countries while being dispossessed of political rights and social status.

What the works above indicate is that gentrification and the presence of a large number of undocumented workers in Europe, though seemingly disconnected phenomena, are both key factors of neoliberal restructuring. Both constitute a response to capitalism's crisis of overaccumulation, and both participate in the same value logic that differentiates space—via urban enclosure or border building—to facilitate capital accumulation. As I aim to show in this chapter, these processes are in fact mutually constitutive.

2.1.3 Building the New Marseille

The urban transformations Marseille has undergone in recent years indicate that neoliberal restructuring has affected the Mediterranean city just as it has other

cities in the north. Now that the local and the global have become so closely intertwined, Marseille has sought to achieve global-city status through urban redevelopment precisely with a view to repositioning itself within a competitive, global hierarchy of cities. At the same time, Marseille's liminal position at the edge of Europe, its century-old integration into transnational networks,⁶⁵ the overwhelming presence of postcolonial migrants in its urban center, and its stagnant economy have significantly inflected the way neoliberal restructuring has unfolded in the city. Specifically, urban redevelopment has presented itself here as a large-scale 'cleansing' operation aimed at replacing the stagnant populations of the city center, all the while capitalizing on Marseille's image as a cosmopolitan Mediterranean city.

Despite such fantasies of cleanliness, the underside of urban redevelopment in Marseille has been its reliance of a vast army of foreign-born workers to do the dirty work in construction, cleaning, etc. In fact, precisely as the city is being sanitized, undocumented migrants are being construed as 'dirt' to be simultaneously hidden—pushed to the periphery via urban enclosure and the reinforcement of (supra) national borders—and overexploited—used as a flexible and disposable labor force in the informal economy. In Marseille, undocumented migrants appear to be to urban redevelopment exactly what dirt is to capitalism: at once its product and its precondition.

⁶⁵ It can certainly be argued that, owing to the city's long history of trade with other Mediterranean cities and its function as a key hub of France's colonial empire, Marseille constituted a global city long before scholars began theorizing the concept.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine the urban transformations the city has undergone through a close investigation of the large-scale project of urban renewal known as *Euroméditerranée*. I explore how this project has paradoxically capitalized on Marseille's long-standing history as a cosmopolitan city, while simultaneously seeking to cleanse the urban center of undesirables, and especially impoverished migrants. I specifically show that, via techniques of spatial enclosure, *Euroméditerranée* has sought to integrate the extra-territorial city of dirt into the proper order of the (neoliberalized) *French République*. I also trace how these spatial techniques have propelled the stagnating port-city into the time—or eternal present—of neoliberal postmodernity, thereby facilitating the accumulation of value in the city center *and* the displacement of human and material waste to the periphery.

I explore in the second part of this chapter the underside of Marseille's gentrification. I begin by tracing the common's remains left after urban redevelopment has transformed the city, noting that dirt has been central to conflicts over the sharing and commoning of urban space in Marseille. I then investigate the new immigration regime, by which a large undocumented labor force has been produced at the juncture between the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders and the neoliberal reorganization of labor in Europe and in Marseille in particular. I look specifically at how borders and the constitution of undocumented migrants as dirt to be simultaneously hidden and overexploited have been key to value circulation and accumulation under neoliberalism. Lastly, I examine how subcontracting in the informal sector has helped create a 'flexible underground'⁶⁶ that has proved essential

⁶⁶ I define this term later in this chapter.

to neoliberal restructuring. In this flexible underground, I argue, neoliberal capitalism has found undocumented labor to be the greatest source of value, just as undocumented migrants have found themselves to be increasingly devalued.

2.2 Euroméditerranée

2.2.1 The Capital of Capital

Euroméditerranée is only the last in a series of urban renewal projects devised by national and international elites seeking to purify a city long construed as abject. None of the earlier projects succeeded in fundamentally altering Marseille's socio-cultural landscape, for every cleansing operation was quickly overcome by new human refuse washing over the Mediterranean city. Nevertheless, *Euroméditerranée* does stand out among others for its scale, scope and sheer ambition.⁶⁷

This comprehensive urban renewal project—which Marseillais commonly refer to as *Euromed*—was launched in 1994 by municipal and national authorities in partnership with the European Union and different private investors. Given its strategic position on France's southern border, it was able to attract 374 million Euros in funding from the municipality and the central state between 1996 and 2006 (Dell'Umbria 2006). Occupying a perimeter of 310 hectares in the city center, *Euromed* oversees the development and/or renovation of a wide range of structures, including: the expansion of the main train station (which now offers a high speed TGV train service connecting Marseille to Paris in less than four hours); the re-development and gentrification of *Rue de la République*; the construction of a

⁶⁷ Promotional materials describe *Euroméditerranée* as the largest project of urban renewal in Europe today.

Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations (MUCEM) at *Fort St-Pierre* as well as a History Museum near the main artery of *La Canebière*; the renovation of Marseille's passenger port;⁶⁸ the rehabilitation of a former tobacco warehouse into an art factory (*La Friche*) along with the revitalization of the *Belle de Mai* neighborhood in which the factory is based; the modernization of *Porte d'Aix* (Marseille's 'filthy' *Arc de Triomphe*, notorious for its informal African market and long squatted by dozens of Roma gypsies and *sans papiers*); the expansion of highway interchanges away from the center of the city; and its hallmark—the building of the new *CMA CGM* Tower, Marseille's first skyscraper, designed by world-renowned Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid and completed in 2010. All of these projects were more recently oriented towards the (re-) creation of a new cityscape for *Marseille-Provence 2013, European Capital of Culture*, a yearlong event which gave renewed impetus to *Euroméditerranée*.

⁶⁸ An employee of SNCM (Marseille's most important shipping company) recently told me that plans had been made to transfer the port of embarkation for the Marseille-Algiers and Marseille-Tunis ferries from the center to the far north of the city in order to reduce the circulation of North Africans in the urban center. I have not been able to verify the veracity of this information.



Figure 2.1: The Global-City-to-Come
Source: Constructa

Euroméditerranée's official goal is to turn Marseille into a dynamic, global city by reviving local industry, bringing in firms connected with the port's economic activities, and integrating the city into larger transportation networks—effectively accelerating its development by 10 years (Dell'Umbria 2012). It is also articulated with the broader *Euromediterranean Partnership*, a Free Trade Area created in 1995 through which the EU has sought to liberalize trade and intensify productivity in the MEDOC region (countries of the Western Mediterranean on both shores of the sea). Overall, *Euromed* has been putting forward Marseille's new image as a fashionable cosmopolitan port-city to attract members of the creative and managerial classes from Paris and beyond, as well as sophisticated travelers from all around the world.

Behind the projects' stated goals, however, lie more prosaic considerations. As of now, *Euromed* has consisted mainly in a vast properties speculation operation leading to the gentrification of key neighborhoods in the downtown area (*Le Panier*,

Rue de La République, Cours Julien, etc.).⁶⁹ Replacing the population of the city center while also generating large profits seems indeed the priority of *Euromed* leaders.

Like all such projects of urban regeneration, *Euroméditerranée* has facilitated the accumulation of value in the city center *and* the displacement of human waste to the periphery. As such, it has been at the center of a class conflict that has played itself out in urban space. Stressing *Euromed*'s inscription in the logics of state and capital, local activists have consistently denounced the urban renewal project. Not only have they protested against successive evictions of poor residents from the urban center, but they have also campaigned against *Marseille, Provence 2013 Capitale de la Culture*, the yearlong cultural event designed to revitalize the city by attracting members of the creative classes from Paris and beyond. For instance, by referring to Marseille 2013 as 'Capital of Capital' rather than 'Capital of Culture,' the poster below suggests that the yearlong event is about to transform the formerly ebullient, working-class city into a dead center of capital accumulation.

⁶⁹ It has also resulted in the construction and expansion of tramways and metro lines, a number of renovation projects around the area of *La Joliette* (schools, housing, and office space in renovated nineteenth-century warehouses), the *CMA CGM* Tower (designed by the world-renowned Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid), Marseille's municipal archives, and a former grain silo converted into a performance space, among other works in progress.



*Figure 2.2: Marseille 2013, Capital of Capital
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2013)*

2.2.2 Chasing Dirt

One of the specificities of *Euroméditerranée* is the way it has capitalized on Marseille's history as a cosmopolitan city. The important presence of migrants in the sunny port-town is fully acknowledged in the project's promotional literature, as is the city's long-standing position at the crossroads of different Mediterranean cultures. Despite this celebratory tone, however, the discourse of local officials can barely conceal their desire to clean up and conquer anew⁷⁰ a city center that has been occupied for too long by the dangerous classes. The cosmopolitanism they promote is in fact at once exoticizing and normalizing: It embraces certain differences while

⁷⁰ *'La reconquête du centre-ville de Marseille'* ('The re-conquest of Marseille's downtown area') is a term often used to refer to urban redevelopment in the Mediterranean city. The deployment of language associated with war and colonization to describe cleansing operations in the city center is no doubt worrisome, especially considering that a large proportion of those who are targeted for removal originate from France's former colonies. It is no coincidence, then, that the expression has widely been used among far-right sympathizers.

rejecting others, and discriminates largely along the lines of class.⁷¹ While clearly attractive to wealthy travelers near and far, it is also significantly removed from the everyday practices and experiences of the poorest Marseillais.

What *Euromed* is offering, then, is a sanitized cosmopolitanism that produces and reifies difference so as to better market the city abroad, while simultaneously relegating the city's undesirables to the urban periphery. In effect, local politicians and urban planners have been quite explicit about the need to replace the populations of the urban center, as though cleansing the city of 'dirty' bodies could help purify a nation under threat. As activists have made clear time and again, dirt-chasing has been crucial to urban redevelopment in the Mediterranean city.

The population most targeted by *Euromed's* cleansing operations has undeniably been Roma Gypsies. By all accounts the most discriminated minority in France and in Europe today, Romas have been the object of countless evacuation procedures on the part of local and national authorities in recent years. The picture below shows a group of Romas being evacuated from the *Porte d'Aix* area, which they had been squatting for months. Interestingly, the man on the picture can be seen carrying bags filled with recuperated trash. The fact that garbage collection and recuperation constitute Romas' main economic activity has certainly contributed to their association with dirt in the popular imagination.⁷² As such, they have been

⁷¹ See Yeoh and Chang (2001) for a similar argument in the context of Singapore.

⁷² A Marseille-based activist nevertheless suggested to me that the reason why there is so much hatred against Romas in Europe is because every time they pick rubbish from the trash, they remind us of how shitty our lives truly are.

regarded by most as a key obstacle to the goal of transforming Marseille into a new global city.



Figure 2.3: Putting ‘Dirt’ in its Proper Place
Photo by Vincent Beaume (2011)

Nevertheless, Romas are not the only ones to have been displaced from the city center. *Euroméditerranée* has also largely targeted postcolonial migrants, as well as the poor in general. Surely, the *Chibanis*, Arab and Black youth, homeless vagrants, deinstitutionalized mental patients, heroin addicts and middle-aged prostitutes I used to see in my wanderings through the city center have gradually disappeared from view. It is estimated now that approximately 3,000 residents have been forced to leave their downtown homes, at times through economic compulsion (i.e., illicit rent increases), but also often at the hands of police.

In spite of official celebrations of a cosmopolitan Marseille, reintegrating the liminal port-city into the French Republican order, while also ejecting from the city center those who fail to display the proper markers of Frenchness has been central to the *Euroméditerranée* project. In a city where boundaries have long proved fluid and

porous, urban redevelopment has entailed the partitioning of space to ensure that everyone is, finally, in his or her ‘proper’ place. Urban cleansing and urban enclosure are indeed bound to each other in the city of dirt.

2.2.3 Integrating Rue de la République

The recent gentrification of *Rue de la République* is emblematic of these processes. This wide Haussmannian boulevard located near the Old Port was built in the nineteenth century with a view to bringing the bourgeoisie back to the urban center, which it had deserted owing to the area’s gradual proletarianization. This goal was never achieved, however, and a century later the boulevard came to be viewed as Europe’s largest squat. In the 2000s, *Rue de la République* underwent the most radical transformation of any other area in Marseille, as hundreds of its residents were evacuated from their homes, and this often violently. Today, the boulevard is hardly recognizable, with global chain stores having opened their doors all along its Haussmannian façades. Nevertheless, hundreds of renovated apartments remain empty on *Rue de La République*, for very few Marseillais have shown an interest in living in this now overly sanitized space.

Given the importance of *Rue de la République* for Marseille’s urban regeneration project, investigating the representations that have circulated around it can certainly prove fruitful here. A large-scale ATEMI advertising campaign designed to sell luxurious apartments on the boulevard provides a series of telling images. The first is that of a young and elegant white woman carrying multiple shopping bags, and accompanied by the following words: “*Mes courses sont en République*” (“I do my shopping in/on the *République*”). Here the picture and its attendant play on words are unambiguous: ATEMI advertises apartments on a *Rue*

de la République that has been reintegrated into the ‘proper,’ bourgeois *République*, thanks to gentrification and the removal of poor, foreign and un-integrated elements. Urban regeneration is thus explicitly conceived here as a cleansing operation. In addition, the proper Republican subject is presented not merely as a white woman, but also as a consumer, suggesting that the French *République* increasingly defines itself as neoliberal.



Figure 2.4: Shopping “en République” #1
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2012)

The second image presents a young black woman who bears all the markers of cleanliness and integration into the Republican order. In a city where close to 50 % of the population is non-white, that a black woman would be represented in an advertising campaign should be unsurprising. Yet given the prevalence in France of a discourse that stigmatizes non-whites who display ‘improper’—un-Republican—dress or behavior, this picture does appear to re-inscribe the frontiers of Frenchness. The young woman can indeed consider *Rue de la République* to be ‘her street’ (*‘C’est ma rue’*) because she acts and dresses as a French woman should.



Figure 2.5: Shopping “en République” # 2
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2012)

Integrating *Rue de la République*, then, can mean two things here. On the one hand, it can signify the possibility for a black woman to integrate the Republican order, provided she is young, pretty, and dressed in Western-style clothing—in short, provided she embraces Republican norms. Here, the young woman integrates the Republican order by integrating *Rue de la République*. On the other hand, integrating *Rue de la République* can refer to the street’s own integration into the Republican order. Here what was once ‘out of France’ has become French through the cleansing operation of *Euromed*. At a more general level, this image suggests that urban renewal is redefining the boundaries of Frenchness in a city where these have always been on the verge of coming undone. It also confirms that, as the Other is increasingly construed as an enemy within, urban renewal becomes a means of protecting the spaces of citizenship through the splitting of non-whites between (clean) good and (dirty) bad immigrants, or into integrated and non-integrated subjects.

Lastly, the third picture presents an athletic young man whose aerial body is crisscrossed with the brand names now holding sway on *Rue de la République*. More than the other two images, this one shows that integrating *Rue de la République* means entering a world of boundless consumption. Most importantly, it entails a process of decorporealization by which dirt disappears entirely from view. Dematerialized through brand shopping, the young man can safely ignore the reality of the (exploited) labor congealed in the commodities he consumes. He can also remain oblivious to the police operations that have cleansed *Rue de la République* so as to meet his consuming desires. In fact, the young man seems to have integrated *Rue de la République* not only by turning himself into a clean and de-historicized subject, but also by morphing into an immaterial mishmash of consumer brands, thus becoming the ultimate postmodern subject.



Figure 2.6: Shopping “en République” #3
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2012)

All three images show clean, fully integrated, and consumption-driven bodies, now at home in a space that once lied beyond the confines of Frenchness. Together, they suggest that ATEMI, and more generally *Euromed*, have pursued the

incorporation of the city of dirt into the (neoliberalized) French Republican order. As such, they confirm that urban redevelopment in Marseille has aimed for the rejuvenation of the city through the relegation of undesirables to silence and invisibility—that is, through the removal of its myriad wrinkles and excrescences.

2.2.3 Entering the Eternal Present of Postmodernity

The ‘spatio-temporal fix,’ Noel Castree (2009) explains, entails long-term investments in fixed assets and the fixing of things in space—both of which serve to overcome space, and, consequently, to unleash capital and commodity flows necessary for profit accumulation to be restored in times of crisis. In Marseille, the massive reorganization of urban space by *Euromed* has clearly had as one of its main goals the speeding up of a city that had been stagnating for decades. Thus the redefinition of Marseille’s boundaries has not been merely aimed at integrating Marseille into the proper order of the French *République*. It has also been intended to unleash flows destined to propel the stagnating port-city into the time of neoliberal postmodernity.

To a large extent, the spatio-temporal fix applied by *Euromed* has succeeded in accelerating the pace of things in Marseille, for the city’s economy has undeniably picked up thanks to urban redevelopment. The temporality Marseille appears to have entered is, nevertheless, a peculiar one. For as I have just suggested in my discussion of ATEMI’s advertising campaign, the time of neoliberal postmodernity is one in which bodies and things are de-historicized. It is one where the materiality of the labor that goes into fabricating the objects we consume is erased, and hence where, as Marx (1963) famously put it, “all that is solid melts into air.” Marseille’s entry into the time of neoliberal postmodernity has thus entailed the

erasure of all that made it a city of dirt. The successive waves of wasted proletarian bodies that once found refuge in the Mediterranean city have disappeared under the brand ‘Marseille,’ now re-packaged for consumption by savvy global travellers.

In “The Sinking of Marseille,” Dell’Umbria (2012) laments the fact that his beloved city, like all global cities now undergoing gentrification, is gradually being turned into a merchandize. He also resents the fact that its commercial image has taken precedence over lived reality, and that Marseille’s inhabitants are now “supposed to become spectators of what used to be their city” (p. 87). I certainly share Dell’Umbria’s pessimism. But I would add that the sinking of Marseille entails far more than the transformation of the city into just another non-place. *Euromed*, I contend, also signals the loss of futurity for all of the city’s inhabitants. For the more Marseille is integrated into the flows of global capital, the more it is stuck in what Frederic Jameson (1991) has termed the eternal present of postmodernity.

The image below makes this especially clear. It shows a *Euromed* advert that specifically connects the city’ speeding up⁷³ to the construction of a history museum in the city center—right on the premises of the *Centre Bourse* shopping mall. Suggesting that Marseille can end with temporal stagnation through the commodification of its 2600 year-long history, the advert seemingly wishes to tame the radicality of a city filled with modernity’s human waste. Moreover, historical time appears here as commodity by which capital valorizes itself in the pursuit of future profit: *Euromed* invests in Marseille’s reified history precisely in order to

⁷³ “*Ma ville accélère*” means “my city accelerates.”

propel the city into the future. Thus the past and the future are collapsed into the eternal present of abstract time,⁷⁴ and neither is able to escape the circular mobility of capitalist flows.



**Figure 2.7: Speeding Up the City
Through the Commodification of History
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2012)**

What this image suggests, then, is that as history itself becomes commodified, a social system apparently centered on absolute change becomes essentially changeless. The contradictions that make the world move forward are flattened out, and so we are left with the incapacity of rupturing the neoliberal space-time that is being forced upon us. As I watch *Euromed* roll over my beloved city of dirt, I am almost made to believe that there is no outside of capitalism.

Yet underneath the brand ‘Marseille,’ the unleashing of capital and commodity flows has left several people, spaces and objects by the wayside. As the city began

⁷⁴ For a sophisticated analysis of the distinction between historical and abstract time, and of the way the two constitute each other under capitalism, see Postone (1993).

to accelerate, waste was produced out of that which could not follow the pace of flows, and profit was produced in turn out of these piles of waste. The differentiated spatio-temporality that ensued is symptomatic of uneven development, and, of course, of lingering contradictions that history's commodification never eliminates. In Marseille today, one can see that the city's entry into the time of neoliberal postmodernity has resulted in residents being split between proper subjects and disposable abjects, and in urban spaces being partitioned into valued and devalued areas. The relegation of undesirables to the urban periphery is nothing but the spatialization of this split.

Now that the spatio-temporal fix has propelled capital and commodity flows in Marseille, urban elites increasingly enjoy the freedoms that come with space-time compression. Meanwhile, the city's undesirables, and especially undocumented migrants, are confronted with the restrictions of space-time implosion. Doreen Massey (1994) once remarked that the power geometry of space-time compression is never equally distributed. I will now show how, in Marseille, urban enclosure and the new immigration regime have rendered this dissymmetry especially acute.

2.3 In the Shadow of the New Marseille

2.3.1 The Common's Remains

Those whose lives are deemed valueless see no value in cleaning up the city, restoring boundaries, or propelling Marseille into the time of neoliberal postmodernity. The human refuse targeted for removal by *Euroméditerranée* would rather continue sharing in the spatio-temporal common, and generally refuse being confined to invisibility. Given the high number of undesirables living in the city center, resistance against the urban renewal project—through marches, protests,

legal actions taken against city authorities, etc.—has been particularly fierce. Under the umbrella of two very active local *associations*, working-class residents actually succeeded in stopping several evacuations on *Rue de la République*, and also managed to obstruct gentrification in adjacent areas.⁷⁵ Two architects working for *Euroméditerranée* told me they feared the intensity of residents' mobilizations, and one urban planner even confessed to reconsidering the ethics of his work after witnessing these events. All three men stated moreover that attempts at revitalizing the city center were regularly frustrated by the return of formerly expelled squatters.

Most strikingly, Marseillais opposed to gentrification have often couched their resistance in the language of dirt. For instance, the name of a popular Marseille-based TV series (which has drawn hordes of tourists to the gentrifying neighborhood of *Le Panier*, where the series' action presumably takes place) was transformed in everyday parlance from '*Plus Belle la Vie*' ('A More Beautiful Life') to '*Poubelle la Vie*' ('Garbage Life'). In turn, several huge signs reading "*Euromerde! On t'emmerde!*" ("Euroshit! Shit on you!") were posted in 2007 on *Rue de la République*'s building facades to protest against the infamous urban regeneration project. The following two images provide further examples of dirt-based resistance in the Mediterranean city.

⁷⁵ See yearly reports published by *Un Centre-Ville pour Tous*—the *association* most actively fighting gentrification in the center of Marseille today.



Figure 2.8: Dirt as a Subversive Art Form
Painting by Andrick (2012)

Reproduced in different areas of the city center, the above artwork by Marseillais artist Andrick subverts an advert that was posted throughout Marseille in prevision of the 2013 cultural events. Thanks to the doubling of three syllables, the phrase ‘*Marseille Provence, capitale de la culture 2013*’ (‘Marseille Provence, 2013 Capital of Culture’) now reads: ‘*Marseille Provence, caca (poop) pipi (pee) tale de la cu cul (ass) ture 2013.*’ Here dirt imagery—excrements, bodily fluids, and anal orifices—is deployed to critique the large-scale cleansing operation promoted by global elites and their local political allies.



Figure 2.9: Unshakable Dirt
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2012)

Lastly, the above image shows a minivan that is now parked permanently on *Rue de la République*, and was occupied for months by a local family after it was expelled from a downtown apartment. The vehicle is covered with washed out sheets displaying (among others) the following inscriptions: “Those expelled from 67 *Rue de la République* present to you their new home” and “You can visit the future here.” As a remain of the urban common, this broken and filthy minivan discloses to the newly settled bourgeois the violence of urban enclosure, which is reducing more and more Marseillais to abjection and waste. The minivan also constitutes a warning: ‘The future is dirt,’ it seems to be saying. The future on *Rue de la République* may indeed be the lack of a future.

These last two actions no doubt point to the resilience of dirt in the Mediterranean port-city. As local and national elites tried to sanitize Marseille, to redefine its boundaries and propel its economy into the time of neoliberal postmodernity, dirt-based resistance did help to maintain the circulation of

undesirable bodies in the city center, all the while causing friction in capital and commodity flows. That dirt would have been so central to contemporary struggles over the sharing and enclosing of Marseille's urban common should come as no surprise. For in this off-place of capitalist modernity where human waste has accumulated over the centuries, dirt has always returned, as if to haunt modern Europe and remind it of its founding violence.

Nevertheless, as time progressed, the common's remains did become less visible in the center of the city. The year 2013 certainly proved a turning point, as thousands of tourists from Europe and beyond flocked to Marseille to participate in the yearlong cultural event. Though less tourists can be seen now that Marseille is no longer Capital of Culture, the city is certainly not what it was when I first moved here in 2008. The sanitization of Marseille seems well underway, perhaps for the first time in its long and filthy history.

Behind Marseille's now glittering façade, abjectified humans nevertheless abound in the darker corners of the Mediterranean city, as urban enclosure and the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders have ejected ever-greater amounts of undesirables into the realm of in-humanity. Though increasingly difficult to see, these undesirables have continued to labor in the informal economy, often even contributing to building the new global city. Many of these men and women are undocumented migrants, and as such are deprived of the right to have rights, of the ability to circulate freely, and indeed of any future to speak of. In fact, just as the proper-tied classes are reaping the benefits of space-time compression, these overexploited laborers are increasingly faced with the violence of space-time implosion.

Urban enclosure and the reinforcement of (supra)national borders in Marseille have no doubt succeeded in removing undocumented migrants from view. Yet these abjectified beings *par excellence* are not exactly gone; they have merely changed location. No longer circulating in the heterotopic off-place I described in chapter 1, they are now stuck in what I refer to as ‘the void of exile.’ The next chapter will trace the experiential shift from the off-place to the void *sans papiers* have undergone in recent years. But for now, I shall examine how the new immigration regime has turned undocumented migrants into the most valuable source of profit in today’s neoliberal economy.

2.3.2 *The Value of Walls*

The new immigration regime cannot be understood without examining how borders have helped produce migrant ‘illegality’ in the last forty years. In the context of Europe, repressive measures to deter the entry of non-European migrants, though initially implemented at the national scale, were gradually harmonized among EU countries at the same time as internal borders were being lifted between them. This led to the 1995 creation of the Schengen Area, which gradually expanded from 15 to 26 countries, and became an increasingly enclosed, protected space, off limits to people from the east and south.

While much has been written about the construction of ‘Fortress Europe,’ external EU borders are in reality not so closed as they appear. Hundreds of thousands of migrants manage to access the EU territory each year; and among these, an increasing proportion end up living in clandestinity. In the specific context of France, it is estimated that there are between 200,000 and 400,000 *sans papiers*—

out of which approximately 28,000 are deported⁷⁶ each year, while another 30,000 are regularized. The vast majority of undocumented migrants can effectively live and labor in France, yet without a legal status—with deportation serving mainly to instill fear among those who remain.

These numbers are important because they indicate that the presence of undocumented migrants in France, and in Europe at large, is not exactly ‘clandestine,’ but rather tolerated and even encouraged by states. As several scholars (Anderson 2004, Anderson 2010, Bernardot 2012, De Genova 2011, Morice 2010, Wills et al. 2010) have argued, the function of present-day borders is not to keep migrants out, but to maintain on European soil a large pool of tractable migrants deprived of social and labor rights. In view of this, EU borders ought to be regarded, not so much as spatial instantiations of state sovereignty or as barriers of nationalistic nostalgia, but as flexible filters that regulate the inflow of migrants in accordance with the flexible needs of the neoliberal economy. Migrant ‘illegality,’ in other words, is actively produced by the state as a strategy of capital accumulation, with borders functioning as spatial techniques that help materialize such ‘illegality.’

⁷⁶ These statistics were obtained from *La Cimade*. Half of the deportees are Roma Gypsies who go home (usually to Romania or Bulgaria) ‘voluntarily,’ i.e., after having received financial compensation from the state for accepting to leave the country. The rumor has it that Roma Gypsies generally come back a few months after having been deported. Insofar as they are official citizens of the EU, travelling through the Schengen area is easier for them than it is for non-European migrants.

Viewing borders in light of capital's logic of accumulation allows us to understand why a split was first created between documented and undocumented migrants approximately forty years ago in all countries of the north. The world was confronted at the time with a severe economic crisis, triggered in part by the 1973 oil shock. As the post-war boom was ending, different governments sought to reorganize labor in ways that would be more profitable for capital. In France, 'illegal' migration was produced for the first time in 1974,⁷⁷ under the Presidency of Giscard d'Estaing. From then on, the country gradually 'closed' its borders and went down the road of neoliberalism, as did all other Western states confronted with the crisis.

Over the last forty years, undocumented labor has become key to neoliberal restructuring on the continent, and this in two fundamental ways. First, the split between documented and undocumented workers has helped break the collective power of labor⁷⁸ by providing capital with an overexploitable, flexible, and disposable labor force. Second, it has provided a cheap supply of undocumented (mainly female) domestic or health care workers that has facilitated the dismantling

⁷⁷ Prior to this, France had one of the most liberal nationality codes in the West (Laacher 2009). Migrants from former colonies could enter the country with hardly any restrictions, and were even actively encouraged to do so. Many Marseillais with North African origins had their fathers or grandfathers come to France as part of labor-recruitment programs. Though the French rarely acknowledge this, France is the European country that has welcomed the largest number of immigrants over the last two centuries.

⁷⁸ This was especially true in France, which had one of the most combative labor movements in the West at the time.

of basic provisions in health and welfare services. As Wills et al. (2010) argue, undocumented migrants have in fact been instrumentalized as part of the class war that has been playing itself out on the continent.⁷⁹ At a more general level, the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders to produce a large undocumented labor force can be apprehended as a process of spatial differentiation that helps generate value for capital. James Anderson (2004) thus seems correct in arguing that the new border regime constitutes another type of spatial fix, one by which the regulation of migrant circulation from the periphery to the core is designed to restore capital accumulation and hence delay the effects of crisis.

Spatial differentiation through border building has helped fuel capital accumulation in Europe in another important way. As Alain Morice (2012) observes, while there are now common norms regarding the granting of asylum, the control and circulation of persons, and the integration of foreigners among countries of the EU, there are no common norms with respect to labor. In other words, repressive measures towards migrants (and hence strong external borders) are being harmonized throughout Europe, precisely as labor rights are left at the discretion of the different national governments. Though seemingly contradictory, this logic has effectively ensured that migrants would meet the specific needs of the different countries concerned, while continuing to live with a fear of deportation throughout EU territory. In other words, it has served to turn migrants into an undocumented labor force that is at once flexible and tractable. By reinforcing in this way the

⁷⁹ This instrumentalization goes a long way towards explaining the growing popularity of far right ideologies among the French working-class.

power of capital over labor, this specific border configuration has also been key to maintaining the profitability of the new immigration regime.

2.3.3 *The Flexible Underground*

According to Anderson (2004), flexible borders that serve to allow migrants in while denying them democratic rights point to a third ‘freedom’ of labor in addition to the two ‘freedoms’ first identified by Marx—i.e., the freedom to work for any employer and the freedom from the means of production that forces one to work. Undocumented migrants’ specific ‘freedom,’ he writes, is in reality “the extra-economic compulsion that comes with being free of rights or attachment to a particular national group” (Anderson 2004). In Marseille and elsewhere in Europe, this freedom/compulsion is being primarily enforced in the informal economy, which has expanded dramatically with the neoliberal turn.

Informal economies no doubt existed prior to neoliberal restructuring; but in the last forty years, they have become important sites of experimentation for new labor practices. The first requirement of neoliberal economies is of course to have access to a hyperflexible and tractable labor force, available when required, undemanding when not, and willing to work under many types of arrangement (which do not constitute ‘employment’ per se). Undocumented workers fit these needs better than anyone because their lack of a legal status and the fear of deportation compel them to accept almost any job offered to them in the informal sector. In turn, the presence of a docile, low paid labor force in the informal economy is beneficial to manufacturers who can then situate production in the EU, but without paying EU wages. Emmanuel Terray (1999) has referred to this latter practice as a form of ‘onsite outsourcing’ (*délocalisation sur place*).

Central to the flexibilization of labor in the informal sector has been the development of subcontracting, and especially cascade subcontracting. In the latter arrangement, the smallest companies at the bottom of the chain directly hire undocumented migrants, whereas the largest companies at the top can pretend to ignore the presence of *sans papiers* workers, while also benefitting from the low cost of the service offered to them. In fact, small producers are often played against one another and forced to rely on irregular labor as large companies at the top push down prices. Subcontracting is also beneficial to large companies because only small (and often ethnic) business owners end up being controlled and fined for employing *sans papiers*. In the context of Marseille, where there is a large population of second and third generation postcolonial migrants, undocumented workers are often employed by members of their own communities at the bottom of the subcontracting chain. This has reinforced the docility of *sans papiers* who often express loyalty towards members of their communities who take the risk of offering them a job, no matter how poorly paid the job is.

When the chain of cascade subcontracting is reconstituted, one can see that *sans papiers* labor in France has helped build such venerable institutions as the *Parvis des Droits de l'Homme* in Paris. In Marseille, many buildings were rebuilt with *sans papiers* labor as part of *Euroméditerranée*, as was the railway system. It has become increasingly clear to most analysts that the informal economy and especially *sans papiers* labor are now structural to the neoliberal economy. According to Alain Morice (2010), there is in fact a historical complicity between the state—with its repressive and regulatory legislative arsenal—and the forms of modern slavery that prevail in the informal economy. In his view, the set of laws and

practices, be these labor or migration related, precede and organize migrants' subjection outside the bounds of the law, as much as they pretend to fight it.

Following Morice, I consider that the informal economy, though officially beyond the confines of the law, is in fact produced by the law. As such, I choose to refer to it in the rest of my dissertation as the 'flexible underground.' In so doing, I express two main ideas: First, the word 'flexible' stresses the fact that flexibility in the informal sector is key to value accumulation; Second, the term 'underground' conveys the notion that the informal economy is both invisible to the eye, and the ground upon which the current economy is founded. I want to insist here that the informal economy is not in excess of the capitalist state, but constitutes rather its necessary margin. Precisely because capitalism constitutes a totality, this margin must be viewed not as a constitutive outside, but as the losing end of uneven development. As such, much of the literature on surplus populations is wrong, in my view, to assume that the latter are delinked from economic globalization. If one takes seriously the new exploitative labor arrangements—which do not necessarily take the form of wage labor—that have developed in the flexible underground, then one can see that surplus populations are simply the new face of the proletariat today. As I will show in chapter 4, this point is important if one is to fully account for the direction the *sans papiers* movement has been taking (or ought to be taking) in France.



Figure 2.10: The Flexible Underground
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2012)

2.3.4 The Value of Dirt

The new immigration regime, then, has differentiated geographical space through the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders, while also effecting a split between documented and undocumented workers that has been key to restoring capital accumulation in a time of crisis. The self-valorization of capital has, in turn, relied on the extraction of value from devalued foreign-born workers that has entailed their ever-greater devaluation. This is so because since labor is at once an expendable factor of production and the source of value under capitalism, the bodies of wage laborers must be used up at ever faster rates for profits to be maximized, until they have no inherent value left and can be left behind as waste.

In short, the more undocumented workers are devalued (through border and wall building), the more value can be extracted from them.⁸⁰ And the more value is

⁸⁰ There is another (especially violent) way in which undocumented migrants once acquired value in France. When Nicolas Sarkozy was Minister of Interior, he designed a point-based

extracted from them (through labor), the more they are devalued in turn. This value logic is, of course, that which fuels capitalism's process of creative destruction. This is a logic that also goes a long way towards explaining why undocumented men and women have been constituted as dirt to be simultaneously hidden and overexploited in France, and in Marseille in particular, over the last forty years.

As Morice (2012) remarks, because undocumented workers' singular existence is erased by the state, they are reduced to being mere labor power: They have no inherent value other than that which can be extracted from their bodies in the search for profit. As such, they constitute dirt *par excellence*. And yet, although they cannot exist socially, undocumented workers cannot be eliminated either because they represent the greatest source of value for capital in the flexible

system that allowed police agents to earn extra money through making a certain number of arrests each month. Depending on the type of infraction committed, the agents were given a different number of points. Every time they arrested someone for banditry, they earned 10 points; arrests for traffic infractions earned them 1 point; and every *sans papiers* arrested earned them 4 points. Given that the first type of infraction is rather uncommon and that the second is not very lucrative, several police officers turned to hunting down *sans papiers* in order to supplement their monthly income. Some even went as far as to say they were "going shopping" when they engaged in this sort of practice (source: Jean-Pierre Cavallié of *La Cimade*). The '*politique du chiffre*,' as it became known in France, evidently amounted to a policy of setting targets on racial profiling that had obvious effects on all people of color in the country. Note that this policy was fortunately repealed in 2012 by socialist Minister of Interior Manuel Valls.

underground. They must be simply removed from view, pushed out of the social world. They must be kept still outside of space and time, while also remaining at the mercy of state and capital. In the shadow of the new Marseille lies not only the flexible underground, but also thousands of undocumented migrants who are experiencing space-time implosion.

As the site where new strategies of labor exploitation and disciplining are being experimented on, the flexible underground is clearly at the vanguard of capitalist development. Yet as Claude-Valentin Marie argues, more than the informal sector, it is undocumented workers themselves that constitute the testing ground for a new organization of work. As Marie himself writes:

The massive reduction in the pay rates of foreign labour in industry, their increasing invasion of the tertiary sector, their relative stability of employment in small businesses, and the renewal of the forms of illegal work, have in this way accompanied, promoted and even anticipated the productive and employment systems and the renewal of working relationships (my translation, Claude-Valentin Marie 1996).

In fact, according to Marie, these new strategies of exploitation and disciplining for which undocumented migrants have offered the ideal testing ground are increasingly being applied to migrants from Eastern Europe, and, gradually, to Western Europeans themselves. If Marie is right, then *sans papiers* are at the vanguard of the world to come. The conditions in which they live and the political forms they are developing are thus crucial for the future of all of us. The next two chapters are concerned precisely with these conditions and these forms.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I investigated the implementation of *Euroméditerranée*, a large-scale project of urban renewal that has aimed to integrate the extra-territorial

and stagnant city into the space-time of neoliberal Europe by ‘cleansing’ the urban center of its many undesirables. In turn, I examined how the recent reinforcement of (supra)national borders has facilitated this process of urban enclosure by producing a class of undocumented migrant workers who, in spite of contributing to building the new ‘global’ Marseille, are deprived of the right to have rights, of the ability to circulate freely, and indeed of any future to speak of.

By examining urban enclosure and the new immigration regime conjointly, I aimed to show that the implementation of *Euroméditerranée* in Marseille and the production of a large undocumented labor force in France and in Europe at large are inextricably linked. Both must be viewed as spatial fixes that were applied in response to capitalism’s inner crisis with a view to restoring the creation and accumulation of value. In turn, both processes have led to an important class fracture between those who enjoy the freedoms of space-time compression and those who suffer the restrictions of space-time implosion. The constitution of *sans papiers* as dirt to be simultaneously hidden and overexploited, I argue, is not only central to neoliberal dynamics; it also conditions the forms of politics that undocumented migrants can develop in the present moment.



Figure 2.11: “Euromed is Coming”
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2012)

CHAPTER 3

THE VOID OF EXILE

*I wish it would rain on the rich as it does on the poor.
It rains on the poor a lot, because they live outside.
The rich, they live inside.*
Saloua

Saloua's commentary on the segregation between the rich and the poor is not a simple metaphor. Saloua herself lived outside for a time, in the shadow of Marseille's City Hall, just off of the Old Port. There she scavenged and survived, until she was sent to a psychiatric clinic. Her memories of the period she spent living in the streets are rather vague (how long did this last? weeks? months? she cannot tell). Yet she does remember being raped on three occasions, each time by a different group of men. She also recalls that since she was *sans papiers*, and hence "outside the law," she never reported any of these attacks to the authorities.

Saloua frequently spoke of dirt in my conversations with her. She said she felt dirty after the rapes, but also when she worked as a virtual slave for a restaurant owner who frequently tossed insults and objects at her, or when her husband of three months repeatedly forced himself into her, eventually throwing her out of the house because she would not meet his insatiable needs. She had no legal recourse, and no one to turn to, which only compounded her feeling that she was valueless. No doubt owing to all the violence she has suffered in life (and I have not recounted everything), Saloua has come to view herself as dirt. It even seems at times that she is no longer of this world. She has been living in France illegally for seven years, yet has never applied for regularization, as if she accepted to be forever locked outside. Now, from within her prison of exile, she oscillates between psychotic episodes and

flashes of brilliance. As she was a professional stage actress back in Algeria,⁸¹ she does often appear to perform for others what is left of her life. And yet, as she herself puts it, she has truly become a “living dead” (*morte vivante*).

Not all *sans papiers* I have met in Marseille have experienced such radical abjection. *Sans papiers* lives are varied and complex, and migrants are unequally equipped to cope with the dangers of being illegal—with different personal attributes (e.g., nationality, gender, race, age, family situation, language skills, education, social networks, available income, individual character, etc.) significantly shaping each singular trajectory. With that caveat in mind, I nonetheless consider Saloua’s situation to be significant for two reasons. First, it reveals the radical vulnerability of migrants who are deprived of rights in France, and whose simple existence is gradually criminalized as a result of this. Second, it is symptomatic of the transition from legal to social and even mental exile that seems to be increasingly frequent among *sans papiers* in Marseille,⁸² in a context marked by urban enclosure and the consolidation of what were once fairly porous national borders.

⁸¹ Lest the reader be tempted to believe that Saloua has fabricated such a past for herself, let me say at the outset that she has shown me a number of elements that corroborate her story.

⁸² The increasing prevalence of psychological breakdowns among *sans papiers* was confirmed to me by two *La Cimade* delegates who have been working for close to twenty years with undocumented migrants in Marseille.

In recent years, the notion of being ‘locked outside’ (*enfermé dehors*) has been deployed by different authors⁸³ to explore the condition of migrants detained in camps and other spaces of confinement (i.e., detention centers, waiting zones, prisons, ghettos, etc.) in Europe and elsewhere today. Though this notion was initially developed by Foucault (1965) to describe the internment of the mad in the classical age,⁸⁴ it has proven fruitful for tracing how the contemporary state exerts power over undesirables by fixing them in the social and political margins. In my own research on illegal migrants who live and work in the city, I have found that the condition of being locked outside extends far beyond that of physical confinement in a relegated space, and indeed suffuses all aspects of *sans papiers* existence. Owing to urban enclosure and to the increasingly repressive procedures by which the presence of migrants on French soil is rendered illegal, a number of *sans papiers* feel gradually enclosed by a series of symbolic, material, and social walls that reduce their intimate, vital space to virtually nothing. I term this process of spatio-temporal implosion ‘the void of exile,’ and liken it to the experience of desolation that characterizes life in totalitarian settings as described by Arendt (1976) and others (see Tassin 2008). I contend that, like a series of disconnected holes tearing at the social fabric, this void effectively drains individual *sans papiers* of substance and value as it gradually pulls them within its indiscernible walls. In the case of Saloua, living outside the law left her isolated, economically vulnerable, and

⁸³ See especially the collection of essays edited by Carolina Kobelinsky and Chowra Makaremi (2009).

⁸⁴ Agier nonetheless reports that Foucault once declared, in an activist speech about Vietnamese boat people, that refugees were the first people to be locked outside (2011b).

psychologically fragile, eventually driving her to the streets and rendering her a pariah. Because she lacked the proper documents, she was reduced to no-thing: a piece of waste to be used, violated, abused, over and over again.

In this chapter, I explore how urban enclosure and the new immigration regime are pushing *sans papiers* into this invisible void. I examine in particular how the joint processes of criminalization/victimization and invisibilization/hypervisibilization are altering their very sense of self, while also securing their disposability in the flexible underground. **To begin**, I conduct a brief overview of recent scholarship on the spatial relegation of undesirables and the border regulation of migrant circulation, and argue that *sans papiers*' experience of the void of exile is currently produced at the juncture between these two sets of power techniques. **Second**, I show how, by locking incoming migrants in the threshold between legality and illegality, the French state enforces their docility as it leaves them longing for acceptance into a moral space built on their recurrent devaluation. **Third**, I look at how a regime of invisibility/hypervisibility is restricting, and even at times immobilizing the movement of *sans papiers* in Marseille, thereby fashioning them into over-exploitable workers. **Lastly**, I conclude that the void of exile in which Marseille's *sans papiers* increasingly find themselves is produced by a two-fold exclusion: from the symbolic worlds in which they once dwelled as subjects of value, and from the protected spaces of the city that they are contributing to build. I contend moreover that the dislocated, depersonalized and devalued subjects that wander in this void are key to the accumulation of profit in the neoliberal age. As such they help sustain the proper-tied subjects who increasingly occupy the center of the new 'global and dynamic' Mediterranean city.

3.1 From the Off-Place to the Void

3.1.1 The Spatial Relegation of Undesirables

Drawing on Foucault's analyses of space and biopower, a number of authors have studied the procedures and techniques by which migrants and other undesirables are now being confined to the state margins. Particularly influential has been the work of Agamben (1998), who has analyzed the figure of the camp as a zone of exception in which refugees and stateless persons are *excluded* from citizenship through being *included* in the juridico-political order. In this zone, Agamben notes, humans are deprived of recourse to the protection of the law while also being subjected to the power of the law. There they remain as "bare life": a life abandoned and reduced to pure animality.

Agamben's theorization of the camp has spawned in turn two main types of studies. Some scholars (see Honig 2001) have deployed the *topos* of inclusive exclusion to describe how assertions of sovereign power enable the (re)founding of political communities, thereby (re)producing the arbitrary division between citizens and their abjectified others. Others have examined instead how the reduction of refugees and other undocumented migrants to bare life, and their relegation to a zone of indiscernability between legality and illegality, has been pivotal to the deployment of the global humanitarian regime (Fassin 2001, 2005b; Redfield 2005; Ticktin 2005, 2006, 2011).⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Agamben's argumentation has nonetheless been met with considerable criticism. One key critique is that because Agamben's analysis of the camp is ahistorical, he fails to see that refugee camps today do not serve to eliminate human beings as the Nazi death camps did,

Using the tools of urban ethnography, anthropologist Michel Agier has also explored the figure of the camp, but this as part of a broader empirical study of the different “spaces of encampment” in which undesirables are simultaneously “relegated (outside) and controlled (inside)” (Agier 2011b: 23). According to Agier, such spaces develop on a continuum of state control and range from places of refuge (vacant lots, squats, informal camps, ghettos, etc.), to places of asylum (immigrant housing, reception centers for asylum seekers, refugee camps, etc.), and places of imprisonment (retention and detention centers, prisons, etc.). Insofar as they are positioned on the “edges or limits of the normal order of things,” they constitute what he calls “off-places” (*hors-lieux*), and resemble as such the heterotopias originally described by Foucault (Agier 2011a: 278-279). In a similar vein, a series of authors have explored the concrete spaces of relegation that have proliferated in recent times in the state margins. Notable works on the topic include Mike Davis’s research on an emerging “planet of slums” (2006), Loïc Wacquant’s study of the increasing symbiosis between prisons and ghettos in the U.S. (2001, 2009), and Engin Isin and Kim Rygiel’s exploration of those “other global cities”—frontiers, zones, and camp—in which refugees and aliens are being rendered abject today (2007b). All of these works have concurred with Veena Das and Deborah Poole’s

but are used rather to ‘protect’ refugees, while also keeping them apart from spaces of citizenship (for a good example of this argument, see Isin and Rygiel 2007a).

reflections on the importance of studying state practices in the urban margins for understanding how contemporary polities operate in the center (2004).⁸⁶

Lastly, scholars have examined the specific spaces in which migrants and other undesirables are more and more confined in the context of France. Stéphane Beaud and Michel Pialoux (2003), Didier Lapeyronnie (2008), and Loïc Wacquant (2008) have explored the formation and consolidation of ghettoized *banlieues* on the periphery of French cities as an effect of economic restructuring in the post-Fordist era. Meanwhile, Florence Bouillon (2009) has conducted a detailed study of the different types of squats that have offered refuge to outcasts in Marseille over the last decade. Focusing on immigrant housing, another group of authors have studied reception centers for asylum seekers. In so doing, they have traced how the twin functions of asylum—hospitality and confinement—reproduce the repression/compassion nexus that characterizes humanitarianism in France. Lastly, scholars have studied the waiting zones and detention centers for undocumented migrants that have been proliferating in France since the 1980s. In particular, Stéphan Le Courant (2009), Nicolas Fischer (2006, 2009) and Makaremi (2009) have studied the *Centres de Rétention Administrative* in which a regime of invisibility/hypervisibility has developed to control the bodies of undocumented migrants.

⁸⁶ See also Iordannis Psimmenos' research on the relegation of female Albanian migrants to "periphractic (fenced-off) spaces" in Greece—in which they are turned into an ephemeral and flexible slave labor force for the sex industry (2000: 83).

3.1.2 Border Management and Migrant Im/Mobility

Taking ‘movement’ as their analytical starting point, ‘autonomy of migration’ scholars have sought to counter the excessive emphasis placed on state domination over the bodies of migrants in the available literature. They argue that the state’s ‘politics of control’ is in fact confronted with a ‘politics of migration’ that exceeds its (re)bordering practices. According to these scholars, it is relations at the border that are key to understanding migrant subjectivity. For the borderzone allows us to grasp not only how power over migrants operates, but also how migrants can contest the latter. In turn, in this literature, greater attention is paid to the economic dimensions of border building, with some authors (De Genova 2009, 2011, Mazzadra 2011) specifically construing the state as mediating relations between capital and labor.

Within and without the ‘autonomy of migration’ literature, scholars have traced a series of recent transformations in the European border regime. Thus Vicki Squire and others (2011) have shown that a set of legal, administrative and technological procedures have developed for the control of migrants inside and outside EU territory. On the one hand, borders have begun to traverse the internal territory of nations themselves, as illustrated by the proliferation of practices of surveillance such as digitalized visa regimes and pre-travel authorization systems. This reflects the fact that borders are now built to protect not against other sovereigns, but against non-state transnational actors (including of course migrants). On the other hand, borders are being externalized to countries south and east of the EU. The outsourcing of migrant controls to less powerful countries is designed to deter or intercept migrants before they reach their destination.

Given these recent developments, the isomorphism between nation, state and territory appears to have vanished. The borders between citizens and aliens are being redrawn so that they no longer correspond to state frontiers. Most importantly, as I argued in chapter 2, the point of borders today is not so much to stop migrants from entering the EU altogether, but to regulate the movement, temporality, and ultimate disposability of migrant labor. This, of course, is what is meant by the concept of flexible borders.

In view of the above, the border today seems to have become the body of the undocumented migrant itself. To put in the words of Peutz and De Genova (2010: 12), “the ‘real’ borders of Europe now exist anywhere migrants may come to experience their crossing.” Thus *sans papiers* find that they are constantly surveilled, and that a wedge is being driven between them and everybody else. Lastly, the fear of deportation, or what De Genova (2011) terms ‘deportability,’ only reinforces migrants’ feeling of isolation, while also rendering them especially docile in the labor place.

3.1.3 At Once Banned and Captured

My research has shown that the subjectivities of *sans papiers* who live and work in Marseille are produced at the intersection between the two sets of spatial techniques I have just described. On the one hand, undocumented migrants in Marseille are increasingly relegated to the urban and state margins, where they live among other undesirables of the French *République*. On the other hand, owing to the recent reconfiguration of (supra)national borders in Europe and in Marseille in particular, *sans papiers* find themselves increasingly immobilized in space and time.

In view of this, I contend that *sans papiers* in Marseille have undergone an experiential shift that has taken them from a heterotopic off-place to what I term the void of exile. Prior to the recent border reconfiguration, *sans papiers* were no doubt marginalized, but they could circulate relatively freely along with other undesirables across the porous boundaries of the liminal port-city. In the void, however, *sans papiers* find that they are being constantly surveilled, and live with the permanent fear of being denounced by employers or neighbors, or else caught in the streets or in the workplace by police to be deported out of the country. Thus, in addition to living in spaces of relegation, they must now hide at all times. Increasingly surrounded by walls, they find they lack a place in the world and undergo an experience of space-time implosion. The void of exile, I argue, largely stems from the fact that the border has become the body of the migrant itself.

I will now trace the emerging subjectivities of migrants who live at the reconfigured and consolidated border, in this spatio-temporal void where politics and economics meet. Specifically, I will explore how migrant subjectivities are being reshaped, and this, at two levels. At the symbolic level, *sans papiers* are being pushed outside of the moral community, as they are being criminalized and/or victimized simply for being undocumented. At the physical level, the deportation and surveillance regime is maintaining them in a state of permanent fear, thereby limiting their ability to circulate in space. This two-fold process, I argue, is pushing *sans papiers* into the void of exile, which then facilitates capital accumulation as undocumented migrants are turned into docile, disposable, flexible, and overexploitable workers.

3.2 Between Legality And Illegality

3.2.1 Becoming Sans Papiers

There are several ways in which one can become *sans papiers* in France today. Some migrants enter the Schengen Area via unofficial routes—often hidden in trucks when they come from the east, or crammed into small boats when they come from the south—eventually making their way to one of the main French cities.⁸⁷ These migrants initiate their journey clandestinely, and often wait for years before they can apply for regularization. Others arrive at official entry points (by plane, train or boat), with or without a visa. Those who can show the proper document—work, student, family reunification, or short-term Schengen visa, etc.—are allowed to enter France and circulate freely until it expires, at which point they will turn illegal if it is not renewed, or if they fail to obtain a *carte de séjour* (a one-, three-, or ten-year residency permit). Those who have no visa to present are initially detained in waiting zones (airports, etc.); if they are not readily deported, they are eventually released into the country⁸⁸ after filing an asylum claim that will likely be

⁸⁷ In spite of the considerable media attention given to this mode of entry into Europe, it is estimated that only 10% of *sans papiers* entered France clandestinely.

⁸⁸ Once they are allowed into the country, and prior to the rejection of their asylum claim, asylum seekers remain under the control of state institutions.

rejected.⁸⁹ These last two categories of migrants begin life on French soil with a legal status that they end up losing further along the way.⁹⁰

No matter how they enter clandestinity, being deprived of a legal status radically alters migrants' trajectory, for the reinforcement of borders has recently transformed the voyage to Europe into a one-way trip.⁹¹ For some migrants, returning home temporarily is already a dangerous eventuality, but for those who lack the proper documents, it also means losing the possibility of re-entering French territory. Going back home therefore entails the risk of being stuck for good in a futureless place, as well as of being exposed to the shame of failure—a prospect that, understandably, very few will embrace. Thus, while many *sans papiers* initially construe the journey to Europe as an escape from that which they experience as a space of social death, the land of freedom that they had imagined rapidly becomes one of enforced immobility. This is in part why several men and women I spoke with claimed (in one form or another) that being *sans papiers* was just like—or worse than—living in prison.

⁸⁹ Statistics.

⁹⁰ To this I might add the case of minors who, after being allowed to reside legally on French territory for years, become *sans papiers* upon turning 18 if they have failed to apply for regularization prior to their entering adulthood.

⁹¹ Several *sans papiers* I spoke with recalled coming to Marseille several times as children (to visit family, get medical treatment, etc.), in a period when border controls were lax and obtaining a visa was relatively easy (prior to 1974, no visa was necessary for citizens of former French colonies). This was a time when traveling back and forth between home and Marseille was easy, and when several North African men made a living out of buying and selling goods across the Mediterranean. The situation has obviously changed dramatically.

Sans papiers' feeling that they are imprisoned is in turn reinforced by the fact that their chances of being regularized have markedly decreased over the last ten years. In effect, regularization criteria have been considerably restrained since Sarkozy became Minister of Interior. As a result, more and more migrants are faced with the possibility that they may never exit clandestinity. Some migrants are even stuck in what is termed 'black asylum,' meaning that they are neither deportable nor regularizable. The number of undocumented migrants has thus been increasing year after year. It is estimated that there are now between 350 000 and 400 000 *sans papiers* living in France, which represents approximately 0.6% of the total population.⁹² Estimates for Marseille revolve around 40,000, suggesting that one in 22 residents of the city is *sans papiers*.⁹³ While being illegal was once considered a transitory state, and even an exception to the rule, living without papers in France—and especially in Marseille—has now become an ordinary condition.

Yet because illegality is necessarily produced by the state, the condition of being undocumented must be viewed as lying not beyond the confines of the law, but at its margins—at the threshold between the law and its obverse. The implications of this are, in turn, most significant. First, as Miriam Ticktin (2005) remarks, the spaces of juridical indeterminacy in which undocumented migrants are increasingly locked are ones in which state policing and humanitarianism meet. Second, as Didier Fassin (2005) observes, the moral economy that sustains these indeterminate spaces is traversed by a fundamental tension between the universalism

⁹² Source: International Labour Organization. It is estimated that 90 % of *sans papiers* are salaried workers.

⁹³ Source: Françoise Rocheteau, delegate of *La Cimade* in Marseille.

of human rights and politico-economic inequalities. In short, the moral economy of humanitarianism must be examined in relation to the political economy of present-day capitalism.

I examine in this section how the development of the repression/compassion nexus is reshaping the moral subjectivities of migrants. I look specifically at two key figures of the undocumented migrant upon which this nexus is built: *the criminal* (generally a man)—the transgressor of the law, false asylum-seeker, delinquent, potential benefit scrounger, etc.—and *the victim* (more often a woman)—the sick, overexploited worker, victim of trafficking or gender violence, etc. I show that becoming *sans papiers* entails being forced into one or both of these categories, a process that not only erases their singular histories, but also pushes them to the confines of recognized humanity. Criminalized and/or victimized migrants, I argue, are trapped within a series of symbolic walls that abjectify them and leave them longing for entry into to the larger moral community. I also show that this process of abjection can lead *sans papiers* to accept highly degrading working conditions, as though they had to expiate for the ‘crime’ of being ‘illegal.’

3.2.2 Good (Non)Citizens

The fact that it is their presence on French soil that is criminalized, and not some wrongdoing they may have committed, is a source of tremendous distress for the majority of *sans papiers*. Several of the undocumented migrants I met felt that their existence itself was reviled as a result of this. A frequent complaint I heard was that *sans papiers* are perpetually blamed for all the current ills of France (e.g., the economic crisis, violent crime, welfare fraud, etc.), when in truth they work harder

than most, respect the law, pay their taxes, etc.⁹⁴ While they no doubt resented their incessant and unjust scapegoating, several *sans papiers* I came to know nevertheless felt morally compromised by their living at the confines of the law. Some even construed their transgression as dishonorable, and internalized the prevailing discourse that associates them with the perils of dirt. Always speaking the words of abjection, Saloua conveyed this to me clearly when she said: “I don’t want to break the law because I don’t want to be dirty. It is bad enough already that I am *sans papiers*.”

Caught between the desire for social acceptance and the necessities of a clandestine life, *sans papiers* usually end up learning to navigate the threshold between legality and illegality in which the French state effectively places them. Thus they may come to justify their transgression of the law by invoking a greater moral good, and/or try to compensate for their illegal presence by acting as good (non)citizens, even displaying at times an unyielding morality. Such strategies, however, rarely grant *sans papiers* the recognition they long for, or guarantee their inclusion into the moral community to which they aspire. More often than not, they lead to their greater exclusion and devaluation, while also generating in them a deep sense of moral dislocation. The story of Ibrahim well illustrates the bind of criminalization in which *sans papiers* seem inescapably trapped.

⁹⁴ A few days after I wrote these lines, Farid, a young Tunisian man I met at *La Cimade* called me from the CRA and said: “I have the impression that all of France is against me. And yet I have done nothing wrong. I don’t understand. I have done nothing wrong. All I want to do is work and be a good man.”

Ibrahim, a thirty-eight year-old Fula from the southwest region of Mauritania, arrived in Marseille in 2004 to join his father who had been residing in the city since the 1980s. Like most men of his region, he made the journey clandestinely, traversing the desert and embarking on a small boat that took him against all odds from Morocco to Spain. Two weeks after landing on European soil, Ibrahim made his way to Marseille and moved into a *foyer Sonacatra* (i.e. state-run worker hostel), where he has resided illegally ever since.⁹⁵ For the next seven years, he worked with false papers, supporting his wife and three children whom he had left behind and never had a chance to see again after his departure for France.

After several years of hard work, irreproachable behavior, and strict religious observance, French authorities uncovered Ibrahim's fraud and ordered him to destroy his forged papers. Ibrahim immediately complied, promising he would not cheat the state again. Obeying the law, however, rendered him far more vulnerable than he had been before, for the only jobs available to him in the informal economy were degrading, precarious, and very poorly paid. Still, he persevered in being an honest (and now fully disposable) worker, as he felt he could count on being regularized fairly soon. After nine years of residence in France, Ibrahim finally applied for a *carte de séjour*. Yet the response he received was not that which he had expected. On the grounds that he had previously worked under a false identity, the police were sent to arrest him at the address he had indicated on his application.

⁹⁵ Because his presence in the *foyer* is illegal, the only way Ibrahim can remain on the premises is by occupying the room of a legal migrant who has gone temporarily to his home country. This, of course, requires Ibrahim to move from one room to another on a regular basis.

Threatened with prison if he did not cooperate, the old Franco-Mauritanian acquaintance who lived there told the police where Ibrahim could be found. That same day, Ibrahim was picked up in his *foyer* and brought to the CRA. He was detained for a period of 45 days, during which the authorities sought to arrange for his deportation—although, for reasons that I will detail later, he was never sent back to Mauritania.

When he recounted his story, Ibrahim took great pride in the fact that he had worked hard to sustain his family, even though he had had to transgress the law in order to do so. The false papers he had fabricated, he said, had given him access to what he termed “respectable and well-paid jobs”—including garbage collector for the municipality, and construction worker for one of the subcontractors engaged in rebuilding Marseille as part of *Euroméditerranée*. Having to lie about his identity had not been easy for him. But it had allowed him to be a good husband and father, and to participate in the development of the city (through his labor) as well as the country (through his tax contributions). This was a moral compromise he could indeed come to terms with. In the eyes of the state, however, the greater good for which he had broken the law could not expiate his crime of being *sans papiers*. In the end, Ibrahim found that living under a false identity gained him far more respect than exposing himself as who he ‘truly’ was. In order to be assigned any moral value, he had to conceal his name, his past, and his very existence.

Ibrahim’s arrest and detention do not merely reflect the fact that undocumented migrants are criminalized simply for being present on French soil. They also indicate that, in order to become subjects of the law, *sans papiers* must necessarily expose themselves as transgressors of the law. For in the moment they

apply for regularization, migrants must reveal that they have been living in France clandestinely, if only by providing a series of documents that attest to their illegal and (often long-term) presence in the country. This is why there is always a risk involved in submitting an application for a *carte de séjour* to the *Préfecture*; though those who have not been accused of any other crime are less likely than Ibrahim to be arrested so quickly. A corollary of this is that the state tacitly acknowledges *sans papiers*' invisible presence in France,⁹⁶ while considering it to be tainted from the very outset. As a result, *sans papiers* are constantly made to feel that they must expiate the crime of being simply there, and endure a series of humiliations to prove that their desire to enter the French moral community is sincere. Such trials include hugging the walls, working for next to nothing, remaining docile when faced with arrest, waiting all night in front of the *Préfecture* (an obligatory step for anyone who wishes to apply for a *carte de séjour*), and of course, confessing to one's transgressive presence before the representatives of the law. And yet as Ibrahim's misadventures suggest, acting as the best possible (non)citizen may never even be enough.

Of course, not all *sans papiers* internalize the notion that being illegal makes them morally impure. But a large number of them do, and this causes an experience of dislocation from the value systems through which they were initially constituted as subjects. Most importantly, this has significant consequences for the reproduction

⁹⁶ As Smaïn Laacher remarks: "What does it mean to be living illegally when, upon being summoned to the *Préfecture*, one must submit a passport, children's birth certificates, a wedding contract, tax declarations, rent receipts, and even at times pay slips, school certificates, gas and electricity bills, etc.?" (my translation, Laacher 2009: 53).

of the politico-economic order. For in the moment they seek to compensate for their initial transgression by showing respectable behavior, *sans papiers* such as Ibrahim end up validating the very law that illegalizes them. Moreover, by continuously working to prove that they are not criminals, but in fact deserving of entry into the French moral community, they not only reinforce the moral norms by which they are excluded, but they also reinforce the opposition between the good and the bad migrant that helps sustain the violent border regime. In effect, it is not uncommon for *sans papiers* to condemn those ‘other’ migrants who engage in criminal acts, and/or stray from the moral order to which they were subjected back in their home country. The French-born children of migrants, in particular, are often described as lost youth who respect neither the laws of the *République*, nor the strict moral norms of their migrant parents.⁹⁷ Even the white poor can come under attack. As Bridget Anderson (2013) argues in the British context, the desire to belong in the moral community prompts some undocumented migrants to dissociate themselves from those whom this same community deems “failed citizens” (delinquents, benefit scroungers, etc.).

Most importantly, the docile behavior *sans papiers* are enjoined to adopt in order to expiate the ‘crime’ of being ‘illegal’ directly serves the process of capital accumulation. In a country where a particularly combative working-class has long resisted the neoliberal onslaught, the tractability of undocumented workers is an undeniable boon to capital owners. As Smaïn Laacher (2009) and Alain Morice

⁹⁷ I have heard quite a few *sans papiers* argue that the French-born children of migrants, *precisely because they are endowed with rights*, “do not have to pay for their crimes, and hence feel that they can do whatever they want.”

(2010) observe, some *sans papiers* themselves uphold the neoliberal norms of flexibility, gladly accepting to work at a moment's notice or at any time of the day or week, changing bosses from one day to the next, relinquishing part of one's salary to help the company survive, training to become entrepreneurs themselves, etc.⁹⁸ In doing so, they not only dissociate themselves from seemingly 'lazy' French workers, but also help to reinforce the competition that pits against one another thousands of disposable undocumented migrants in the flexible underground. Nevertheless, in my observations, such migrants remain a minority. For the most part, *sans papiers* resent being treated as disposable labor, even as they feel compelled to accept the humiliating trials that their undocumented status effectively brings them.

3.2.3 *Loving Victims*

While being the best possible (non)citizen can never guarantee *sans papiers* entry into the moral community, victimization seems to offer them at least some form of symbolic recognition.⁹⁹ Being reduced to the position of victim nevertheless entails a process of devaluation that may leave *sans papiers* feeling just as abject. In this context, migrants may seek to compensate for their impurity through the practice of affective labor, that is by giving love—for practically nothing—to those who properly belong in the moral community. As Saloua's own story attests, victimization can transform a *sans papiers* into a pure living/loving body.

98 In *Mythologie du Sans-papiers* (2009), Laacher narrates the story of Farid, a Tunisian *sans papiers* who fantasizes about opening his business and becoming "his own boss."

99 I should note here that men are more likely to take on the role of good (non)citizens, whereas women tend to position themselves as victims.

Saloua, as I mentioned earlier, had been a professional stage actress back in Algeria. After divorcing a violent husband and suffering the disdain of her conservative relatives, she left her small eastern town of Buna and moved to the capital Algiers. There she managed to enter the world of theatre she had long fantasized about. For a few years, she even had a successful career. She not only acted in critically acclaimed plays, but danced and sang on television as well. By her own account, Saloua was a short-lived star. Her face was everywhere to be seen in Algeria and beyond.

But then came aging, a first depression, the loss of employment, and gradual isolation. Little by little, life in Algiers could no longer be lived. Saloua says she moved to France to try and save herself. She hoped to work as an actress in the land of Molière; however, things did not go according to plan. When Saloua landed in Marseille, she found not welcoming arms, but dirty and highly dangerous streets.

After she arrived in France, and owing to all that she endured before and after coming here, Saloua developed myriad health problems—both mental and physical. Throughout my long conversations with her, Saloua ceaselessly talked about herself, her past glory, her wasted life, and the invisibility that engulfed her now that she was *sans papiers*. Yet her narration was always interspersed with complaints about her various ailments, as though the pain in her body suffused every word she uttered. Saloua had spent months, years perhaps, interned in medical institutions (both general and psychiatric) in France. As health care is by law accessible and free to *sans papiers* in the country, the hospital turned out to be the only space where she could obtain some sort of visibility. Though she could never

assert rights she did not have against her former abusers, she could nevertheless be recognized as a suffering body.

During her last, three-month stay at the psychiatric clinic, Saloua befriended Dalila, a wealthy Franco-Algerian woman who was hospitalized like her for severe depression. Though Saloua and Dalila were both equally ill, the first was undocumented, whereas the second had French nationality. When the two women left the clinic, Dalila asked Saloua to come and live with her in her beautiful house by the sea. They were friends now, and Dalila did not want Saloua to return to the streets. Saloua accepted the offer without hesitation.

For the past three years, Saloua has been working as a virtual slave for Dalila in her house by the sea. Dalila is partly handicapped and so requires permanent attention. Saloua, who is also suffering from multiple ailments, must nevertheless clean the house, buy the groceries, cook, give Dalila her daily treatment and help her with physical reeducation. She works 10 hours a day, seven days a week, for no income—though she does get pocket money to buy cigarettes. Saloua says she is doing all of this out of love.

When Saloua spoke of her relationship with Dalila, she said she was grateful to her for having removed her from the streets. But then there always came a moment when Saloua would explode: Dalila was driving her mad, she could no longer stand being Dalila's slave! And so she would get herself sick again, just so she could take a break from Dalila at the hospital. There, doctors and nurses would partly restore her broken body, infuse some reproductive labor power into her again, so that she could go back to being overexploited in the beautiful house by the sea.

Inevitably, Saloua would return to Dalila. The poor woman was alone in the world and needed Saloua. And then Saloua was *sans papiers*. She was sick and dirty. She was a living dead. Who else would want to live with her? Who else would employ her? At least she made herself useful by taking care of Dalila. Being an undocumented affective laborer made it impossible for her to extirpate herself from a highly exploitative relationship.

Whether they are considered criminals or victims, *sans papiers* are *at once* socially devalued as transgressors of the law *and* economically valued as a disposable (material or affective) labor force. It appears, in fact, that the more they are construed as waste to be relegated to the nation's peripheral spaces, the more value can be extracted from their invisible labor. As Marc Bernardot remarks: "The illegalization of a growing proportion of people residing in Western countries coincides with the capacity of such policies to confer on them a use value that is inversely proportional to their loss of legitimacy [...]" (my translation, Bernardot 2012). It is no coincidence that, as he sought to gain social recognition by working hard under a false identity, Ibrahim contributed to the cleansing and urban development of Marseille; for in doing so, he unwittingly ensured that he and others like him would be gradually excluded from the center of the city. Similarly, Saloua was turned into a loving victim, valued only insofar as her affective labor could be extracted to give life to a documented woman. In short, the more *sans papiers* seek recognition through upholding the division between the pure and the impure, the more they reinforce the moral order that criminalizes or victimizes them.

3.3 Visible and Invisible Walls

3.3.1 Hiding in Full View

For migrants who have come to reside clandestinely in Europe, being trapped in the threshold between legality and illegality does not simply entail remaining stuck at the border of the moral community. It also means living in the interstices of the global city: in the ghettos and wastelands that the joint processes of urban enclosure and border reconfiguration have been generating across the continent. In the case of Marseille's *sans papiers*, dwelling in this threshold effectively amounts to hiding in the shadow of *Euroméditerranée*, the large-scale urban regeneration project via which the once marginal city is being gradually integrated into fortress Europe and into the time of neoliberal (post)modernity.

Precisely because they lie at the frontier, and not outside of the capitalist state, the urban interstices in which undocumented migrants are most likely to hide cannot be apprehended independently of the logics of state and capital. This effectively means two things. First, while the urban margins may seem invisible to those who live at the center, they are not only produced by the state, but also constantly surveilled by it—with ever more refined technologies for the detection and arrest of undocumented migrants being deployed over those spaces. Second, the most exploitative forms of labor today are taking place in these urban interstices, wherein the flexible underground articulates with the legal economy to sustain capital accumulation. That these interstices constitute *at once* a privileged site for the overexploitation of undocumented migrants *and* the territories over which state control is most violently deployed is of course no coincidence. The simultaneous illegalization and surveillance of undocumented migrants serves precisely to secure

their overexploitation in the flexible underground. According to Marc Bernardot (2012), what is occurring now is no less than a process of migrant capture, reminiscent of the slave capture wars of times past.

Until just recently, Marseille itself was a large interstice, a city of dirt dwelling in the shadow of the modern French state. I described earlier how undesirables could circulate in the urban center more freely than the white bourgeoisie. With urban enclosure and the rapid reinforcement of police controls,¹⁰⁰ however, the heart of the city has been gradually enclosed, and the borders of the (supra)nation-state have been redrawn in the process. While the center of Marseille has yet to be fully gentrified, the spaces in which *sans papiers* can live and work have thus been dramatically reduced. The urban interstices themselves have become highly treacherous, as state surveillance in these parts has become especially intense, and the practice of denunciation has begun to spread among all categories of Marseillais. Sans papiers in Marseille now live in perpetual fear of being controlled by police at work or in the streets, arrested in their homes, denounced, detained, and/or deported.

¹⁰⁰ According to the *sans papiers* I spoke with, police controls in the center and in the *quartiers nord* (the poor neighborhoods located in the north of Marseille) became far more frequent following Nicolas Sarkozy's initial crack down on undocumented migrants in 2006, which he carried out while he served as Minister of Interior under Jacques Chirac's government.



Figure 3.1: The CRA (With Miguel Inside)
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2013)

At once illegalized and surveilled, *sans papiers* must constantly watch where they go, be careful whom they associate with, avoid going outside during police controls. They must remain perfectly calm when patrol cars drive by.¹⁰¹ And they must never, never forget to pay their bus or tramway ride, lest they be found to have broken the law. The life of a *sans papiers* is a life in hiding; and because the gaze of the state can be lurking just about anywhere, this hiding feels as though it is always in full view. The stories of Miguel and Ibrahim show that *sans papiers* must perpetually make themselves invisible in conditions of hypervisibility.

¹⁰¹ While men are for more likely to be stopped by police in the streets, women are always at risk of being denounced (as are men) by greedy employers or vengeful cousins.

I first met Miguel at *La Cimade*, where he had come to ask for legal advice after losing his third appeal against the OPFRA's rejection of his asylum claim.¹⁰² Though a highly resilient man, Miguel was clearly taken aback by the response that was given to his appeal. Now that he was *sans papiers*, he was no longer eligible for state support (the allowance he received as an asylum seeker amounting to 300 Euros a month), nor could he continue to reside at the *CADA*¹⁰³. The only option he had left to meet his basic needs was to look for daily work at *La Plateforme*—the parking lot of a construction store where dozens of Sub-Saharan *sans papiers* wait every morning (usually from 6 am to noon), hoping to be hired by mostly French (white, Black or Arab) employers¹⁰⁴ for “not so poorly paid” construction jobs. Moreover, he now had to spend his nights in a homeless shelter. The rejection letter from the OPFRA had pushed him instantly to the most precarious spaces of the city.

Miguel and I soon became good friends, and more than any other *sans papiers* I have come to know in Marseille, he allowed me to glimpse into the void where his life had fallen. On a few occasions, he took me with him through the streets of Marseille, showing me the spaces where he and other *sans papiers* struggled to survive and, if at all possible, worked and socialized. When I met him, Miguel's daily routine amounted to sleeping and showering in the homeless shelter,

¹⁰² Miguel's asylum claim was rejected because he had failed to submit his application within the statutory period. The various appeals he submitted afterwards could never erase that initial 'mistake.'

¹⁰³ Reception Center for Asylum Seekers.

¹⁰⁴ I write 'mostly' because some of these employers are regularized migrants who have set up shop in Marseille and also want to gain access to cheap labor.

walking to *La Plateforme* early in the morning, waiting a few hours for someone to give him a day job, and, if he was not picked up (which was often the case), chatting with other *sans papiers* and/or wandering aimlessly through the streets of Marseille until the shelter would reopen its doors (at 6 pm).

Going to the plateforme every morning required Miguel to develop the most adept police dodging skills. He learned to spot police cars from afar. He took note of the times when controls were likely to take place. He warned his fellow *sans papiers* if he saw anything suspicious, and expected them to warn him in turn whenever police cars came by. On two occasions, he used his exceptional wits to convince police agents that they should let him go because he was a “poor, innocent *sans papiers* who would likely be killed if he were deported.” The third time he was caught, however, the routine did not work and he was sent directly to the CRA.

3.3.2 *Encounters with the Law*

Once they are in the CRA, *sans papiers* can respond in multiple ways to their incarceration and to the threat of imminent deportation. Some try to wound themselves, in the hope that a new medical status will preempt their deportation (prompting the authorities to free them once the maximum detention period of 45 days is over). Others attempt suicide, possibly feeling that this is the only way to escape the power of the law, or to avoid renewing with social death at home. A large number of *sans papiers* rebel, protest, or even try to escape.

When Ibrahim was first detained in the CRA, he opted for the strategy of invisibility. He made himself discrete, polite, excessively docile. He explained that he had been working with false papers to sustain his family, which he had left

behind in his small village deep in the desert. He said he was a good father and a good Muslim. And the police liked him: He was to them a good *sans papiers*.

Ibrahim waited quietly for the day of his release, but with the unwavering fear that he might be deported. On the day he was taken to the Mauritanian consulate for official identification, he disappeared under yet another false identity. He confirmed that he was a Fula, but a Fula from Senegal. The consul knew better, but was not interested in having Ibrahim deported, and so did not issue the required *laissez-passer*. Four days later, Ibrahim was taken to the Senegalese consulate, where he confirmed that he was a Fula, but a Fula from Mauritania. The consul believed him, and so did not issue the required *laissez-passer*. Officially unidentifiable, Ibrahim could not be deported anywhere, and the French authorities had to release him a few days later. In effect, the more the state had tried to identify him, the more Ibrahim had erased all traces of who he was. In order to remain as a *sans papiers* in France, he had had to undergo radical depersonalization.¹⁰⁵

Miguel's behavior during his 45-day stint in the CRA came in marked contrast with that of Ibrahim. Every time I went to visit him, he bragged about how popular he had become in the center, and this with both other detainees *and* with the police. He mentioned that he was regularly asked to break fights between inmates or between inmates and guards, and that several police officers had told him they wished for his rapid release (this was no doubt the truth, as I myself saw two policemen show him astonishing support as they brought him handcuffed to the

¹⁰⁵ Drawing on the work of Stéphan Le Courant (2009), I argue that detention in a CRA causes *sans papiers* to experience the type of depersonalization characteristic of total institutions as described by Erving Goffman.

Appeals Court in Aix-en-Provence).¹⁰⁶ Though such popularity no doubt testified to Miguel's wit and charisma, there was something thoroughly uncanny about the visibility he had gained inside the CRA. One day, one of his police 'buddies' joked in the intercom—thus making sure everyone in the center could hear—that he could

¹⁰⁶ The behavior of police in charge of detaining *sans papiers* proved far more complicated than I had imagined. While a large proportion of police officers are undeniably racist and/or derive sadistic pleasure from the power they hold over the bodies of the detained (on this topic see Ticktin 2011), a number of them seem quite uncomfortable with the tasks they are being asked to accomplish. Three *sans papiers* I spoke with reported that police officers in the CRA told them they could not understand why 'good workers' like them should be put in prison while the real criminals were left roaming outside. A rumor even circulates among *sans papiers* that police officers can let people go free during identity controls, and may turn a blind eye when detainees try to escape from CRAs. In 2008, a significant proportion of the police force went on a nation-wide strike to protest against the *politique du chiffre*—i.e., the state policy whereby police are rewarded for catching large numbers of *sans papiers*. Furthermore, depression among police officers assigned to the CRAs has become common, which has led the administration to have officers work in the centers for ever shorter periods of time. Lastly, delegates of *La Cimade* are currently assisting a former policewoman who left the force after falling in love with a *sans papiers* and being confronted with the violence of the French state towards undocumented migrants. One may of course argue that all this merely reflects the workings of the repression/compassion nexus, but I would suggest that state agents who are caught within this nexus can also become aware of its inherent violence and may want to distance themselves from it. That said, the vast majority of 'dissenting' police officers do not appear to reject the border regime in and of itself, nor do they critique the good vs. bad migrant opposition that helps to sustain it.

see what Miguel was eating, that he knew all that Miguel was doing, and that there was nowhere Miguel could hide. This was apparently intended to be funny, and Miguel claimed to enjoy the attention he was receiving. But when I asked him how he felt about being permanently under watch, he replied that to have other people in charge of his life and body was the worst prison imaginable.

In effect, the peculiar bonds Miguel was able to create inside the CRA could not protect him from the surveillance techniques that had captured his vigorous body. The walls of the center not only prevented his escape into the underground, they also fixed him under a diffuse yet omnipresent gaze that seemed to penetrate his most intimate self. As I witnessed the physical and psychological degradation he underwent over the course of his incarceration, I had the impression that the CRA walls were slowly closing in on him, penetrating his skin, dissolving the protective boundaries that formerly let him be Miguel and enabled him to breathe. In truth, Miguel was dying to leave. Not only was he panicked at the prospect of being sent back to Angola (where he risked lifelong imprisonment and possibly torture), he also constantly talked of his desire to escape that suffocating place. It seemed that the more he brought attention on himself through hiding behind a mask of amiability, the smaller his vital space became and the more he was emptied of his inner substance. Voluntarily positioning himself at the center of the center, he underwent radical depersonalization, just as Ibrahim had by making himself infinitely small.

Miguel's manipulation of the gaze that encircled and asphyxiated him nonetheless allowed him to avert the outcome he dreaded. On the day he was taken to the Angolan consulate to be identified as a citizen of the country, he caused a commotion by forcefully entering the premises with his handcuffs still on (i.e.,

before the police could remove them as required per international law), while also shouting in French and Lingala that the French authorities had been abusing him. This was a strategic maneuver aimed at ensuring that consular services would not search for his name on Angola's 'wanted' list (he had been issued an arrest warrant), and hence would fail to deliver the *laissez-passer* with which the French could have deported him. Miguel's spectacular cunning proved ultimately successful. In order to diffuse the scandal that he had created, the consul immediately signed a document stating that he was not Angolan, but most likely a citizen of Congo-Kinshasa. As a result, French authorities had no choice but to release Miguel two weeks following these events.

3.3.3 *The Gaze in the City*

When he was released from the CRA, Ibrahim had no choice but to return to the *foyer* where the police had caught him 45 days earlier. This was a source of tremendous stress for him, as the authorities now knew where he lived and could arrest him again any time they wished. Though he had not been able to switch to a different building, he did move in with a friend who resided in the same *foyer*. Yet he knew that, if pressed, any of his neighbors could let the police know where they could find him. I spoke with Ibrahim one day after he was released from the CRA. He said that he was unable to look for work because he was too terrified to circulate in the streets of Marseille. He had tried to walk to the metro station in the morning; yet upon seeing two police cars at a nearby square, he had panicked and returned immediately to his minuscule room. Ibrahim's voice trembled as he recounted his first day of 'freedom.' It seemed as though he knew he would never feel safe again—neither inside, nor outside the walls of the *foyer*. I feared he would now

make himself fully invisible, possibly for the rest of his life, as his prospects for regularization appeared increasingly remote. Ibrahim, it seemed, was slowly vanishing into the void of exile.¹⁰⁷



Figure 3.2 Ibrahim in his Minuscule Room
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2013)

As for Miguel, he was a much more fearful man after his passage in the CRA. He never returned to *La Plateforme* following his release, especially since identity checks in the area had become a daily occurrence. Deprived of his main (albeit precarious) source of income, he began to accept less lucrative jobs, which he

¹⁰⁷ The last time I spoke with Ibrahim, he was still unemployed and forced to live off his neighbors in the foyer. This was a source of tremendous humiliation for him, all the more so because he was no longer able to support his family back in Mauritania. Nevertheless, he was consulting a lawyer and gathering documents in preparation for a new *carte de séjour* application.

obtained through dubious contacts. He said he would do any type of work at that point, for he needed to pay his rent no matter what: He refused to return to the homeless shelter where he had spent so many nights after his asylum application had been rejected. Eager to avoid the depersonalizing spaces that perpetually threatened to close in on him, Miguel preferred to let his soul and body go to waste in the flexible underground. Though a higher level of fear did not prevent him from circulating in the darker corners of the city, it did ensure that the void would also gradually close in on him.¹⁰⁸



Figure 3.3: The Release of (Depersonalized) Miguel
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2013)

¹⁰⁸ As of now, Miguel is considering moving to Paris, where police controls are reputed to be less frequent, and where a black man can more easily disappear into the dark crowds of *Barbès* and *Château Rouge*. Insofar as Marseille is for the most part inhabited by Arabs and whites, Sub-Saharan Africans often feel more at home in some of the predominantly black neighborhoods of Paris than they do in the Mediterranean city.

In the regime of invisibility/hypervisibility generated for undocumented migrants by the new surveillance techniques, migrants can no longer protect themselves from the gaze of the state. For now this gaze is everywhere: in the surveillance cameras scattered across the new global Marseille, in the police cars that patrol the city's darker streets, in the *Préfecture* where *sans papiers* must expose themselves in order to obtain a *carte de séjour*, and of course in the CRA. And surely, the latter space is that in which the gaze of the state penetrates the bodies of *sans papiers* most deeply. None of the *sans papiers* who have spent time in the detention center have come out unaffected. All of them have integrated the gaze; hence fear is imprinted onto their very souls. The regime of invisibility/hypervisibility has effectively succeeded in depersonalizing them. Whenever I had a *sans papiers* in front of me, I could see the specter of deportation that risked sending him or her back to the space of social (and at times physical) death where he or she never wished to return. Even the most fearless and resilient among them lived under the shadow of deportation, trapped as they were in the void of exile the neoliberal security state had created for them.

According to De Genova (2010), deportability serves primarily as a technique of labor regulation that maintains undocumented migrants in a state of permanent fear, thereby rendering them docile and, of course, overexploitable. I certainly agree with this assessment. But I would add that it is precisely because *sans papiers* are immobilized in space and time through various fear-inducing techniques that capital can continue to circulate so smoothly across urban and national borders. Most importantly, it is the dislocated, depersonalized and devalued subjects that wander in the void exile that help sustain, through their overexploited

labor, the proper-tied classes that increasingly occupy the center of the new ‘global and dynamic’ Mediterranean city.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored how *sans papiers*, who previously circulated with relative ease in the off-place of Marseille, have found themselves gradually immobilized in space and time owing to urban enclosure and the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders. I termed this process of spatio-temporal implosion the void of exile, and likened it to the experience of desolation that characterizes life in totalitarian settings. By following closely the experiences of three *sans papiers* in Marseille, I specifically examined how the joint processes of criminalization/victimization and invisibilization/hypervisibilization have been altering *sans papiers*’ very sense of self, while also securing their disposability and overexploitability in the flexible underground.

This excursion into *sans papiers* lives revealed that the void of exile is produced by a two-fold exclusion: from the symbolic worlds in which they once dwelled as subjects of value, and from the protected spaces of the city that they are contributing to build. It also showed that the dislocation, depersonalization and devaluation of *sans papiers* is key to the accumulation of profit in the neoliberal age. Having explored the *sans papiers* subjectivities that are being produced in the void of exile, I now turn to studying the novel political forms that are emerging at the site of the void. The next chapter is concerned precisely with how *sans papiers* who have been immobilized in space and time can constitute themselves as political subjects with the capacity to radically transform the world that is abjectifying them.

CHAPTER 4

POLITICS AT THE VOID

*Do I feel like I'm from here?
I feel at home on this earth that was created for everyone. I am at home.
People ask me: 'Why don't you go back home?'
If you manage to leave your home, there are reasons for that.
You know the reasons.
When you leave a place, you find the void.
You come here, and you start from zero.
The void is where you find yourself anew.*

Pierre

*In its generic meaning,
Communism is that which lies before us.¹⁰⁹*

Rémy Bac
Du communisme
2009

Pierre's initial entry on the European continent was marked by smoke and blood. Along with a dozen other men from Congo-Kinshasa, he came to Marseille from Algeria in 2001, crossing the Mediterranean sea on a large ferryboat. In spite of their black skin and Congolese accent, Pierre and his companions were easily let on board with their fake French passports. Yet when they landed in Marseille, things did not go according to plan. The border police, sensing that something was amiss, inspected the men's documents only to discover they had all been stolen. The fraudulent migrants were rapidly locked up in Marseille's *CRA*.

The detention center was located at the time in an old warehouse on the Arenc docks, right next to where the men had been caught. Pierre and his

¹⁰⁹ My translation.

companions were in fact incarcerated in what had long been a clandestine prison.¹¹⁰

For one excruciatingly long week, they waited to be sent back to Algiers on the same ferryboat that had earlier brought them to the European dreamland. One hour prior to their scheduled departure, however, they glimpsed at the sea through the tiny window, spoke of freedom, and collectively opted to block the doors with the surrounding bunk beds. When the border police came to pick the men up, they found the doors were locked. As issuing threats proved completely fruitless, they fired tear gas into the rooms to quench the rebellion. The determined migrants did not open the doors. Instead, they cut their wrists open, and wrote multiple times on the walls with their blood:

France
terre d'asile¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ The illegal detention of migrant workers in the Arenc warehouse began in 1964. It is in this makeshift prison that techniques for the incarceration and deportation of undocumented migrants were first rationalized in France. When news emerged in 1975 that migrants were secretly detained—by arbitrary police decree and without any legal recourse—protests broke out to demand the center's immediate closure. In response to the scandal, successive right-wing governments in France sought to regularize the situation through legal reform. Yet it was the socialists who, with the Pereyrite law of 1981, first legalized the practice of detaining undocumented migrants with a view to deporting them. In 2006, the center was moved to *Le Canet*, a peripheral neighborhood of Marseille where activists are less likely to go and protest on behalf of *sans papiers*. On the history of the Arenc detention center, see Spire (2001).

¹¹¹ France land of asylum.

The *Préfet* was called up in emergency. Shocked by the blood inscriptions which he saw on the walls, he sought to reassure the men, eventually convincing them that they could remain in the country and file an asylum claim. Having emerged from the smoke-filled rooms, Pierre and his companions were taken to the tribunal. There the judge issued each of the men a *sauf-conduit*, which stated that they had fifteen days to leave France or request asylum. Later that day, a blood-stained Pierre was released in the heart of the *Euroméditerranée* district, under an overpass squatted by a dozen Romas. At last Pierre was free to wander through the streets of Marseille. Since he had no relatives or close friends in the Mediterranean city, he slept in a homeless shelter for the next several months. Pierre's first taste of Europe was indeed drowned in smoke, blood, and solitude.

Over the next twelve years, Pierre struggled to emerge from the void into which he was thrown upon first landing in the liminal port-city. He found regular (though illegal) employment as a construction worker, moved into a decent apartment, married a woman from his home region, raised two beautiful children, and recently received his first *récepissé*. In addition, he began participating actively in the meetings of *Groupe Confiance*, where he appeared as one of the most vocal and politicized *sans papiers* I have known in Marseille. At several protests and rallies, I have heard him speak compellingly of the need for justice; and though his regularization is likely a matter of months, he continues to support the actions of his undocumented comrades.

Pierre is of course one of the 'lucky' ones. His youthful body, his eloquence, and his remarkable drive have all enabled him to overcome a series of hardships few others have encountered without feeling broken. Moreover, his steadfast conviction

that the earth was created for all filled him with the audacity to confront the police first in the Arenc center, and then later in the political actions which he joined in Marseille. By contrast, the vast majority of Marseille's *sans papiers*, their minds too occupied with the perpetual fear of being deported and the struggle for daily survival, long shied away from political engagement. Most strikingly, very few *sans papiers* collectives emerged over time in Marseille, and the well-publicized 2008 undocumented workers' strike never traveled from the French capital to the Mediterranean shore.

In recent years, however, the marked restriction of regularization criteria and the proliferation of police controls have been fueling the politicization of Marseille's *sans papiers*. Owing to the never-ending wait and the degradation of daily existence, more and more undocumented migrants are losing hope of securing permanent residency; hence they are beginning to view collective political action as the only possible means of escaping the void. As I will now turn to show, in the void of exile *sans papiers* are not only finding themselves anew, they are currently unearthing as well the seeds of a new world to come.

In this chapter, I explore the politics of *sans papiers* as they collectively struggle to emerge from the spatio-temporal void to which they are being increasingly confined. **To begin**, I review the different scholarly approaches to citizenship and migrant politics, and suggest that both the classic literature on citizenship and the more recent 'non-citizen citizenship' scholarship fail to see the radical implications of *sans papiers*' increased positioning 'outside' of space and time. **Second**, through a close examination of the *Groupe Confiance* collective at *La Cimade*, I explore how a common experience of dislocation, depersonalization and

devaluation in the void of exile has prompted the emergence of a generic class of *sans papiers* in Marseille. **Third**, I show that the political subjectivation of *sans papiers* originates in their unique condition as dis-identified, generic subjects. I also examine how, in the moment they emerge from the void and onto the political scene, *sans papiers* can effect a rupture in neoliberal space-time. **Lastly**, I conclude that, through their political practices, *sans papiers* are gradually building a new common at the border of the nation, one that supersedes the logics of both state representation and capitalist valuation.

4.1 Contested Citizenships

4.1.1 The Nation of Human Rights

The institution of citizenship, as several scholars have noted, is fundamentally paradoxical. On the one hand, it functions as the framework for democratic belonging (universal citizenship) within a particular nation-state. On the other hand, citizenship presupposes the existence of a bounded national community based on the exclusion of non-members (bounded citizenship). As Linda Bosniak (2008) argues, this contradiction reveals that, despite all the universalist rhetoric, identity remains one of the core elements of citizenship.

As the first modern state to have combined national sovereignty with the declaration of universal human rights, France provides an especially fruitful lens through which to examine the contradictions of citizenship. In her studies of hospitality during the French Revolution, Sophie Wahnich (1997) has documented how the foreigner proved a paradoxical figure of Republican universalism—one that revealed that the territorialization of identities necessarily entails the closure of the revolutionary project. In fact, while the French today often take pride in their

country's model of integration—in which nationalism is conceptualized in terms of political membership rather than ethnic descent—critical scholars have shown that exclusion and racialization are in fact constitutive of the Republican tradition.

For a long time, social theorists (see Brubaker 1992, Honig 2001, Simmel 1990) were concerned with studying the ways in which national communities treated non-citizens. As such, citizenship studies focused mainly on the politics of inclusion/exclusion that accompanied the institution of citizenship. Nevertheless, as Kitty Calavita (2005) argues, the dichotomy between citizen-member and immigrant-outsider has been increasingly displaced in the literature. Some authors have thus begun exploring how rights can be expanded for immigrants through struggles at the border of nation-states (see for instance Benhabib 2004).

Studies have now been produced that examine how nationality and citizenship are gradually dissociated, and scholars have begun conceptualizing novel modalities of citizenship that have developed in the context of large migration flows. Some of these new configurations include 'multicultural' (Kymlicka 2000), 'transnational' (Bauböck 1994), 'postnational' (Soysal 1994), 'cosmopolitan' (Linklater 1998), 'global' (Dower 2003), or even 'flexible' (Ong 1999) citizenship. While these studies have proved rich and provocative, an increasing number of scholars have more recently turned to critiquing the institution of citizenship itself, as the foundations of sovereignty seem to be increasingly undermined.

4.1.2 Citizens Beyond the State

As Hannah Arendt argues, the identification of the rights of man with the rights of people first came to light with the rise of statelessness in the aftermath of WWI. What was unprecedented at the time, she wrote, was not so much "the loss of

a home, but the impossibility of finding a new one” (Arendt 1976: 293). Arendt’s assessment has perhaps never sounded so true as it does today, now that the number of refugees and other displaced persons in the world can be counted in the millions.

Since studies of transnational or multicultural citizenship are unable to account for these new developments,¹¹² scholars have begun critiquing the limits of citizenship itself. Thus they have turned to studying the non-citizen acts of citizenships that have recently developed beyond the confines of the state. Isin Engin and Greg Nielson (2008) have, for instance, focused on the acts of citizenship by which migrants can foster novel forms life protected from the violence of the sovereign exception. Others like Monisha Das Gupta (2006) have studied how certain immigrants can fight against subordination through claims that do not rely on citizenship. Lastly, Anne McNevin (2011) has looked at the practices of irregular migrants for whom outsider status is both a mode of subjectification and a site of resistance.

In turn, autonomy of migration scholars have examined the political practices by which refugees and other undocumented migrants can undermine prevailing accounts of state sovereignty. In particular, drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière (1995), Peter Nyers (2003, 2005) has shown how undocumented migrants can emerge on the political scene by forcefully including themselves in the political community that refuses to see and hear them. In a similar vein, Enrica Rigo (2011)

¹¹² As Wihtol de Wenden (2010) suggests, the concept of multicultural citizenship is applicable only to regular migrants, not to undocumented ones or to refugees.

has looked at the informal citizenship of undocumented migrants that disrupts prevailing assumptions about citizenship as a territorially delimited category.

4.1.3 Building Another Space-Time

The studies I have just reviewed either focus on how migrant politics can cause the boundaries of citizenship to shift, or on how non-citizen acts of citizenship can question the logic of sovereignty itself. Despite some obvious differences, both these sets of studies have been primarily concerned with how migrants relate to the state. Insofar as they have treated capitalism as a mere background for nation-state formation, they have failed to examine how the production of migrant ‘illegality’ is directly bound up with dynamics of economic exploitation. Thus, while they concede that politics of immigration control and regulation have hardened in all countries of the north from the 1970s onwards, they omit to connect this process to capital’s need for an overexploitable labor force in a time of crisis.

In my view, there are two main problems with these approaches. First, they provide an ahistorical account of the exclusions generated by the state, which is reified as an unchanging, overarching power. Second, by ignoring the radical implications of *sans papiers*’ increased positioning ‘outside’ of space and time, they provide an inadequate conceptualization of *sans papiers*’s modes of political subjectivation in the neoliberal moment. In this chapter, I seek to overcome these lacunae by paying close attention to the links between state sovereignty and the logic of capital accumulation. Considering that the categories of space and time are key to capitalist (re)production *and* to the constitution of migrant subjectivity, I examine the political subjectivation of migrants in light of the spatio-temporal void to which they are being increasingly confined. Specifically, I show that *sans*

papiers' increased positioning in the void of exile is forcing them to develop political forms that go beyond a mere critique of citizenship, and that radically question the politico-economic logic by which they are both excluded and overexploited. I contend that, in the moment they emerge onto the political scene, *sans papiers* effect a radical rupture in neoliberal space-time that interrupts the logics of state representation and capitalist valuation that together turn them into dirt.

4.2 The Formation of a Generic Class

4.2.1 The Possibility of Trust

The *sans papiers* movement was born in France as a series of isolated struggles that followed President Giscard D'Estaing's decision to close the borders of the country in 1974. Largely invisible at first, *sans papiers* entered the French imagination in 1996, when hundreds of men and women whose demands for regularization had been rejected found refuge in two Parisian churches and went on a well-publicized hunger strike. In the years that followed, the movement grew stronger as countless battles were fought in the courts and in the streets. Most strikingly, since 2008, thousands of Paris-based *sans papiers* workers—hailing from places as varied as North and West Africa, China, Vietnam, Turkey, Afghanistan and Eastern Europe—have begun to strike in the sectors of construction, cleaning, security, catering, and home care. Today, the *sans papiers* movement has garnered the attention of scholars, activists and political parties, not least because of the crucial questions it raises concerning the long-term future of France, Europe and the world at large.

The *sans papiers* movement has nevertheless developed primarily in the Paris region. In Marseille, *sans papiers* have been far less vocal and visible on the political scene.¹¹³ Given the city's position at the edge of Europe, its long history of revolutionary politics, and the large number of undocumented migrants living in its interstices, this would seem to constitute an anomaly. In fact, it is the current labor configuration that helps explain the low level of mobilization among Marseille's *sans papiers*. For the most part, undocumented migrants in the Mediterranean city do not work in large French companies, but in small, non-unionized businesses often

¹¹³ An important *sans papiers* committee was nevertheless set up in Marseille in the 1990s by a particularly radical delegate of the CGT—the most important union confederation in France, long affiliated with the PCF (French Communist Party). Though the committee's foremost organizer was French, *sans papiers* were directly implicated in decision-making and in the coordination of political actions, which ranged from strikes to marches and protests in front of the *Préfecture*. A significant number of undocumented workers obtained their papers following these actions, yet the committee rapidly unraveled after accusations of fraud were made against its former treasurer. In addition to the well-known *sans papiers* committee of the CGT, small, autonomous *sans papiers* collectives have been set up over the years to create bonds of solidarity and share efforts in requesting papers. None of these collectives, however, has had any traction among the general *sans papiers* population. Apart from the above, most mobilizations on *sans papiers* issues in Marseille have been driven by French activists *on behalf* of undocumented migrants—through *associations* or workers' unions such as *Réseau éducation sans frontières*, *Espace accueil aux étrangers*, *Forum Réfugiés*, *La ligue des droits de l'homme*, the *CFDT*, etc. This comes in marked contrast with the situation in Paris, where most *sans papiers* collectives have insisted on remaining autonomous from French organizations.

owned by relatives or members of the same national community. This fragmented landscape has left undocumented workers considerably isolated, and created few opportunities for them to meet around a set of common grievances. In turn, family or community loyalties have often prevented *sans papiers* from rebelling against situations that would have otherwise felt highly degrading.

In view of the considerable isolation of undocumented migrants in the city, the *Groupe Confiance* collective at *La Cimade* emerged as one of the rare spaces in which *sans papiers* could constitute themselves as effective political subjects. Given the fact that *La Cimade* is one of the most important humanitarian *associations* working with undocumented migrants in France, this may seem surprising to some. While the *association* has been criticized for reproducing the failings of humanitarianism, such negative assessments have failed, in my view, to render the complexity of volunteers' commitments.¹¹⁴ For in contrast to what much of the critical literature suggests, most volunteers at *La Cimade*—at least those of the Marseille section—construe their activities as inherently political. These volunteers consistently problematize the politico-economic logic that turns migrants into *sans*

¹¹⁴ For most *La Cimade* volunteers, working within the parameters of the law is necessary to ensure that the highest possible number of *sans papiers* will be allowed to remain in France. In this sense, they seem to reproduce the depoliticizing discourse of emergency which scholars (see Fisher 2006, Nyers 2005, Redfield 2013, Ticktin 2011) have critiqued in their studies of humanitarianism. And yet, for the most part, *La Cimade* volunteers are also fully aware that the body of laws with which they have to work is growing more and more violent, and that only political action can fully restore justice for *sans papiers*. This is precisely why the *association* has long been a center of activism on migration issues in France.

papiers, as well as the power differential that exists between migrants and themselves. In fact, given the acute political awareness of *La Cimade*'s two delegates in Marseille, *Groupe Confiance* was created precisely with a view to offering *sans papiers* the possibility of being far more than passive recipients of humanitarian aid.

Many of the *sans papiers* I met at *Groupe Confiance* initially came to *La Cimade* to request legal assistance, and eventually joined the collective thinking it would help them obtain their first *carte de séjour*. *La Cimade*'s delegates had established from the start, however, that the collective's mission was *not* to solve individual cases, but rather to create a space in which *sans papiers* could forge bonds of solidarity,¹¹⁵ and then develop political actions by which they might collectively transform the politico-economic logic that produces migrant 'illegality.' Though this space was created by activists themselves, meetings were conducted in such a way that *sans papiers* would retain their autonomy within the collective. Little by little, the *sans papiers* who had hesitantly joined the collective at first began to engage in forms of politics that went far beyond the mere demand for regularization. Others, like Fatou (a long-term human rights activist from Senegal), have been vocal participants from the start, and have placed the activities of *Groupe Confiance* at the center of their *sans papiers* existence.

¹¹⁵ Approximately half of the people who come to the meetings at *La Cimade* are (white and non-white) French citizens or regularized migrants, while the other half are *sans papiers*. *Groupe Confiance* was also formed with a view to creating bonds of solidarity between people located on either side of the border, and this goal was to a large extent met.



Figure 4.1: Fatou in Political Action
Photo by Arianne Dorval (2013)

No longer content with hiding and waiting for documents that may or may not endow their existence with state-sanctioned value, the various members of *Groupe Confiance* have thus begun participating in weekly *cercles de silence*,¹¹⁶ protests in front of the *Préfecture*, demonstrations against the deportation of fellow *sans papiers*, a letter-writing campaign, and various political rallies. Some members recounted their stories in front of a large activist public at the 2012 *Forum social mondial en Provence*, while the testimonies of five *sans papiers* were integrated into a play presented by an Austrian company as part of *Marseille 2013*. While the collective may not be fully representative of Marseille's *sans papiers* population as a whole, the dynamics it has given rise to are indicative, in my view, of emerging

¹¹⁶ First launched in 2007 by a Franciscan activist in Toulouse, *les cercles de silence* (circles of silence) are formed once a week on Marseille's central *Canebière* avenue. During one hour, a group of approximately thirty activists along with a few *sans papiers* stand around in a circle without uttering a word, thereby alerting the general public about the violence the French state is exerting on undocumented migrants.

political forms in the city and beyond. I will now trace the conditions that make these novel political forms possible, as well as their implications for our common future.

4.2.2 *The Void in Common*

When undocumented migrants come to a *Groupe Confiance* meeting for the very first time, they generally describe how life as a *sans papiers* is filled with abjection. Frequently, one can actually see the marks of desolation on their tired bodies. The first time Saloua joined the group, for instance, she seemed catatonic. Her slumped shoulders, her emaciated skin, her disoriented gaze, everything about her indicated that she had fallen deep into the abyss. After an hour spent in silence staring down at her feet, she began to shout. Her mother had just passed away, she cried, and because she was undocumented, she had not been able to return home to see her one last time or mourn at her graveside. She spoke as if being stuck in the void had broken the last tie she had left with the world of humans.

Sans papiers often speak of how their attachments to others are being undermined, perverted, and even shattered owing to their lack of a legal status. Thus they explain that, because they are not allowed to travel, the distance between them and those they left behind in the *bled*¹¹⁷ is nearly impossible to bridge. Moreover, the never-ending wait for papers can cause bonds between lives lived apart to erode gradually. Ahmed, for instance, confessed that he feared he might not recognize his sons if he saw them again. His boys were so little when he left Kabylia, he said, surely now they must be grown men. He added that in his weary mind, the contours

¹¹⁷ '*Bled*,' which means 'land' in Arabic, is now frequently used in France to refer to migrants' town or country of origin.

of his mother's face had become more and more blurred. He often thought of her, yet felt that she had lost her substance. Though she was still alive, she now seemed like a ghost that trailed him in the void of exile.

The lack of a legal status also significantly limits *sans papiers*' ability to form lasting relationships with documented people in Marseille. The precarity of their situation makes it almost impossible for undocumented migrants to envision a future with others beyond day-to-day survival. And because their radical vulnerability exposes them to all sorts of abuse, the relationships they form are usually contingent, filled with distrust and even violence. The new immigration regime has, in fact, been perverting *sans papiers*' relations to others to the point where key categories of their daily experience are reversed. Thus, just as the land of asylum turns into a prison, good workers are criminalized, compassion works hand in hand with repression, those who build the new global city must perpetually hide, police can befriend and surveil you at once, and apparent friendships can collapse into virtual slavery. Perhaps this upturning of the world is what an older *sans papiers* was referring to when he said to me: "We have no bearings left."

Love is also a complicated affair for *sans papiers*. The category of *mariage gris*,¹¹⁸ which began to circulate under the presidency of Sarkozy, has helped cast considerable suspicion on *couples franco-étrangers*. As a result, couples who do manage to form across the legal divide are met with incredulity by nearly every person and institution that comes their way. For years the collective *Les amoureux*

¹¹⁸ *Mariage gris* (grey marriage) refers to marriages in which a foreigner has duped a French person into marrying with the sole intention of securing permanent residency in France.

*au ban public*¹¹⁹ has been assisting those couples, helping the undocumented partner obtain a *carte de séjour*, and working to convince the French population that love across borders is indeed possible. But for now, such efforts have borne little fruit. Sometimes African men like Miguel, tired of being accused of seducing women merely to secure permanent residency, stop dating documented women and practically restrict their social circles to other *sans papiers*. The desolation that ensues can be even more radical. I once met an Algerian *sans papiers* who had spent fourteen years of his life sleeping (and drinking) in a dilapidated car, because he had no one to love and there was no other place on earth that he could call his home.

At *Groupe Confiance* meetings, *sans papiers* often explain that they live in perpetual fear of being reported to the authorities. The new immigration regime has in effect fostered a culture of denunciation in France which is truly terrifying.¹²⁰ What is more, until 2012, helping an undocumented migrant was considered a crime (ironically referred to by activists as ‘crime of solidarity’), so that one could go to prison simply for offering a bed to a *sans papiers*. To avoid being deported in this

¹¹⁹ The name of this collective is a play on words derived from a famous French song by Georges Brassens: ‘*Les amoureux qui se bécotent sur les bancs publics*’ or ‘Lovers kissing on public benches’. After a slight alteration of the phrase, we are left with ‘*Les amoureux au ban public*,’ or ‘Publicly banned lovers.’

¹²⁰ Three members of *Groupe Confiance* were reported to the authorities at some point: Houria by a jealous neighbor, Ahmed by a rival from his home region, and Elsa by an employer who refused to pay her for her work as a cleaning lady in a luxury hotel. Elsa was pregnant at the time, and the shock she suffered when the police knocked on her door and took her to the CRA was such that she had a miscarriage.

degraded climate, *sans papiers* feel that they must lie about their legal status to nearly everyone—neighbors, co-workers, friends, etc.—even often fabricating a new identity for themselves.¹²¹ Deportability, I came to see, does not merely enforce *sans papiers* docility. It is a stigma that marks the soul. It is an invisible noose placed around the neck of every undocumented migrant, one that any person endowed with proper documents can choose to pull if he or she wishes to erase out of social existence a demanding employee, a difficult tenant, a neighbor, a rival, or an enemy.

More than criminalization, more than overexploitation, deportability is experienced by *sans papiers* as an injustice. Many of those who come regularly to *Groupe Confiance* meetings—and almost all of the men who do—have come very close to being deported. And in the two years that followed the group’s creation, three of its members were arrested and incarcerated, which proved a source of tremendous distress for all those who remained ‘in circulation.’ Two of the detained—Ibrahim and Miguel—were eventually released, but the third—Katib—was sent back to Tunisia after having spent two weeks in detention. At every meeting, there seems to be an unspoken feeling that any of the persons present in the room might be absent the next time. The group is always at risk of being dismembered, hollowed out, its individual members sucked back into the void.

¹²¹ In Aki Kaurismäki’s 2011 film ‘Le Havre,’ a Chinese *sans papiers* going by the name of Chang explains to the main character (who goes by the name of Marx!) that all his documents are under a false name, and that therefore “he has no opinion because he doesn’t exist.”

And yet, the bonds that have been forged over time among the undocumented members¹²² of *Groupe Confiance* have proved particularly strong. A sort of solidarity of the abject seems to be emerging. It is as though a common experience of the void had prompted these various *sans papiers* to hold onto each other so tightly that no one can ever fall back into its vortex. Those who have been rendered desolate seem to believe that by attaching themselves to others on the edge of the void, they might become human again. And surely, as weeks went by, I saw Saloua and others reintegrate the world of the living from which they thought they had been forever excluded. In this sense, the name of the collective (selected by one of its undocumented members) proves appropriate. For while the word ‘*confiance*’ means ‘trust’ in French, the collective did provide a space in which abjected *sans papiers* could find trust in the world again.

4.2.3 Common as Dirt

The meetings at *Groupe Confiance*, but also the many interviews I conducted, have revealed that the experience of the void, though one of radical isolation, is shared by a majority of *sans papiers*. Yet they also indicate that the lives of undocumented migrants significantly differ from those of documented ones.

¹²² The bonds that were created between undocumented and documented members of *Groupe Confiance* also allowed the more privileged activists to glimpse into the void and feel its paralyzing coldness. Though they never risked being sucked into this void, activists (including myself) were also significantly affected by the detention and deportation of a *sans papiers* comrade. In particular, Miguel’s 45-day disappearance behind the walls of the CRA was very acutely felt, especially since he was such a regular and vocal presence at the meetings of *Groupe Confiance*.

Many of the *sans papiers* I spoke with insisted that their experience of exile was incomprehensible to the children and grandchildren of former immigrants.¹²³ The vast majority also claimed that documented members of their own communities (and even families) often viewed them as inferior or abject because they lacked the proper documents. ‘*Sale sans papiers*’ (‘dirty *sans papiers*’), I discovered, is an insult migrants easily toss at each other in times of conflict. Odette, a middle-aged woman from Cameroon, phrased it in the following terms: “In your own community, if you have no papers, you are nothing, you have no value.”

My research has also revealed that documented migrants have considerable power over undocumented ones. Migrants who have obtained French residency or nationality can easily take advantage of those who live with the fear of being deported. Several *sans papiers* I came to know claim to have been abused and

¹²³ To be sure, non-whites in France are hardly recognized as proper citizens, even when they were born on French territory. Those who originate in North or Sub-Saharan Africa are especially likely to experience racism and—in the case of men—undergo frequent identity checks. Yet unlike *sans papiers*, French-born and regularized non-whites are not as frequently overexploited; nor do they live with the perpetual fear of being deported. Some can even access the ranks of the bourgeoisie (or ‘*beurgoisie*’—‘*beur*’ being the slang term used to designate Franco-Arabs, the word is now used to refer to the emerging Franco-Arab bourgeoisie), provided they display the markers of properly integrated subjects. I should nevertheless point out that because a *carte de séjour* is not automatically renewed, regularized migrants can always be forced to reenter clandestinity. As such, those who have been regularized find that their new status remains highly precarious. In fact, the transitory aspect of one’s legal status indicates that being *sans papiers* is not an essence, but rather a state-produced, structural condition.

exploited in their communities precisely because they were paperless. The story of Saloua I recounted earlier clearly illustrates this process. Another telling example is that of Nadia who, during the ten years that she was *sans papiers*, financially supported her unemployed cousin who threatened to report her to the authorities if she did not pay all of the rent of the apartment they shared.¹²⁴

My point in mentioning this is *certainly not* that migrants bring violence upon themselves, or that institutionalized racism and exploitation on the part of Europeans pale in comparison to such forms of in-group violence. Rather, I wish to indicate that the neoliberal production of ‘illegality’ in France and in Europe at large has been driving a wedge between undocumented migrants and documented ones. It bears emphasizing in turn that this wedge is *not* an unintended effect of increasingly repressive laws. As Alain Morice (2010) points out, the tractability of undocumented workers in the informal economy rests to a large extent on the hierarchy that has been created in this way within migrant communities. In fact, most of the *sans papiers* who recounted these stories insisted that such forms of abuse did not occur back in their home countries, where bonds of solidarity had not yet been broken by the violence of Europe’s new immigration regime.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Nadia’s cousin did eventually denounce her, but because she gave the police the wrong name, Nadia could not be located and hence was never arrested.

¹²⁵ It bears emphasizing, however, that established migrant communities remain an important resource for *sans papiers* when they first land in France. While in-group abuse has no doubt developed due to recent changes in Europe’s immigration regime, solidarities nevertheless continue to exist between documented and undocumented members of any given national community.

What I am arguing, then, is that owing to the brutal policies that are being implemented towards recent immigrants in France and in the EU more generally, a class re-composition is currently under way—in Marseille of course, but also, one can only suppose, elsewhere on the European continent. A new class of workers is emerging, formed by undocumented migrants who not only are being overexploited, but also share the same (non)location in the void of exile. While the dispersion and isolation of *sans papiers* in the city render collective awareness of this class position difficult to form, the creation of a space like *Groupe Confiance* has allowed its undocumented members to recognize that they do have the void in common.

The formation of a class of dislocated, depersonalized and devalued workers in France and elsewhere in Europe has, in turn, implications that scholars have only begun to address.¹²⁶ First, just as race has long served to split the working-class between exploited whites and overexploited blacks, legal status is increasingly playing documented¹²⁷ and undocumented workers against each other.¹²⁸ It is arguably no coincidence that paper-based divisions are being created at a time when

¹²⁶ Bosniak and others argue on the contrary that little distinguishes the life of undocumented migrants from that of permanent residents or even citizens. I strongly disagree with them on this matter.

¹²⁷ By ‘documented’ workers, I mean regularized migrants but also French nationals of any origin. My point here is that workers are at present being split along the lines of legal status.

¹²⁸ This division has reproduced itself in the split between *sans papiers* collectives and anti-racist organizations, which have expressed different concerns due to their different structural positions in French society. For a discussion of the tensions between the two movements, see Mogniss Adballad *Personne n’est illégal* (1999).

liberal societies are beginning to overcome the racial hierarchies that have historically legitimized exploitation—as shown by the emergence of non-white bourgeoisies on both sides of the Atlantic. In fact, the increasingly complex (and intersecting) hierarchies that are currently splitting workers—be these material or immaterial—along the lines of race, gender and now legal status have largely developed in the flexible underground, along with the system of cascade subcontracting I described in chapter 2. In a city like Marseille, where the informal sector is vast and ethnic entrepreneurship crucial to the economy, capital accumulation clearly thrives on the elaboration of these new divisions. The tractability of undocumented migrants exploited by those situated only slightly above them in the flexible underground has only further facilitated the process of accumulation by forestalling the development of a strong *sans papiers* movement in the Mediterranean city.

The second key implication of this class re-composition is that radically precaritized undocumented workers are not so much racialized as stripped of their identities. On the one hand, the fact that *sans papiers* are not recognized by the state means that they in-exist in the order of representation.¹²⁹ On the other, dislocation, depersonalization and devaluation in the void of exile together undermine *sans papiers*' very sense of self, to the point where some have begun to identify with abject (in)humanity. That this new class exceeds any national, cultural or racial identification was confirmed to me by *sans papiers* themselves. Many of the women

¹²⁹ They may exist in this order as criminals or passive victims, of course, but they lack any effective legal status.

and men I spoke with claimed to have more in common with *sans papiers* from other countries than they did with documented relatives or regularized members of their own communities. Most interestingly, Miguel remarked that his passage in the detention center had enabled him to connect with men from all over the world who, like him, underwent radical erasure at the hands of police. It should come as no surprise that, in this violent space where invisibility and hypervisibility combine to radically depersonalize *sans papiers*, a common consciousness of the void has been developing.¹³⁰

Lastly, precisely because they are stripped of their identities, these undocumented men and women appear to form what the young Marx referred to as a ‘generic’ class. In the *Manuscripts of 1844* (2007), Marx presented the ‘proletariat’ as generic by virtue of the fact that it is not an identity. As he saw it, being a non-identity, the proletariat constitutes humanity itself, which is why he believed the emancipation of this class was the emancipation of humanity as a whole. Similarly, the class of dislocated, depersonalized, and devalued *sans papiers* now being formed at the edge of Europe is generic precisely because its existence is without predicates. Like Marx’s proletariat, it does not constitute a sociological category fixed in the order of representation, but rather a generic singularity with the potential to stand for the whole of humanity.

In Badiouian terminology (1988: 68), the name ‘*sans papiers*’ constitutes an “act of a-specific nomination,” referencing a void in (re)presentation. In

¹³⁰ Michael Sparke (2006) uses the term ‘carceral cosmopolitanism’ to refer to the bonds that are created between those imprisoned in global spaces of exception.

psychoanalytical terms, this corresponds to the *objet a*—which is also the very name of dirt. As the generic class *par excellence*, as the ultimate *objet a*, *sans papiers* may well be regarded as the contemporary world's feces to be expelled. Forced to break with their home, their past, and their identity, they are effectively turned into common, dirt-like men and women. And because they are common—because they have no value, no form, no proper place and no proper name—they can be exploited, devoured, emptied of their substance and left behind as waste. Trapped in the void of exile, thrown out of time, they can nevertheless emerge on the political scene through engaging in universalizing forms of politics. It is to the political subjectivation of this generic class that I now turn.

4.3 Rebuilding the Common

4.3.1 From Lack to the Universal

According to Hannah Arendt (1976), humans who have been stripped of all that made them singular beings amount to nothing: They are naked humans. The words and actions of those who have been deprived of membership in a political community, she writes, have no consequences on the workings of the world. Following Arendt but also Agamben, several scholars have noted that by reducing refugees to bare life, the humanitarian regime deprives them of what makes them political beings. In particular, Liisa Malkki (1996) has argued that the refugee is construed in humanitarian discourse as a suffering body, who can then appear as the universal manifestation of all humanity precisely because his political history is erased from view.

In contrast to the Arendtian and Agambian scholarship, I argue that the refugee's nakedness makes her a universal figure that is in fact wholly politicized.

For the naked body of the refugee is not necessarily passive, caught in power-knowledge regimes that reinforce her social erasure. Indeed, the genericity of the bare body can also be a site of radical contestation. When Pierre spread his blood on the walls of the Arenc center, he not only used his body as a political tool, he also reoriented the French gaze from a particular vision of abjection to the broad horizon of radical equality. In that formerly secret prison situated on the edge of the world, Pierre cut his naked body open and outlined with his blood the word ‘France’ in a color that circulates inside the veins of all humans. The power of his political gesture, I contend, lied precisely in the fact that this color is common to us all. Red may well be the color of the common; it is, after all, the color of revolution.

In turn, in the meetings and actions of *Groupe Confiance*, the singular political histories of *sans papiers* are never denied as such. Yet what brings these women and men together is not a shared identity, but a common experience of lack—i.e., lack of papers, of value, of a place where they might be human again. In *Reinventing the Republic*, Catherine Raissiguier (2010) comments positively on the way coalescing around a position of lack has enabled the *sans papiers* movement to gain traction in France, but also to join in struggles with other groups that share a similar experience of lack (the homeless, the unemployed, etc.).¹³¹ What I want to stress here, rather, is that precisely because national, racial, gender, class or religious

¹³¹ These common struggles may explain why, among the ordinary French, the term ‘*sans papiers*’ has come to refer not only to undocumented migrants, but to any person who seems dirty and lives in extreme precarity. *Sans papiers*, it would seem, now stand for all those who are ‘*sans*’ (without): *sans domicile* (homeless), *sans travail* (unemployed), *sans voix* (voiceless), etc.

identifications cease to prevail in the peculiar space of *Groupe Confiance*, the social relations that develop in their wake prove profoundly egalitarian. If anything, the erasure of *sans papiers*'s particular histories and the stripping of their identities lead not to silence and invisibility, but to the dismantling of fixed roles and hierarchies. Thus, a sanguine Congolese adventurer, a semi-mad Algerian actress, a subdued Fula farmer, a charismatic Angolan revolutionary, a lonely Kabyle butcher, a shrewd Bosnian sportsman, a proud Senegalese human rights activist and countless others can share equally in the experience of lack and nakedness, but also in the possibility of a new world to come.¹³² In effect, precisely because it is generic, the *sans papiers* collective that was constituted out of the void is pregnant with radical equality.

What the *Groupe Confiance* experiment suggests, then, is that the void of exile is both a site in which migrants undergo dis-identification, and one out of which new, universalizing forms of politics can emerge. As Badiou argues, insofar as the void is inaccessible to representation, its constitutive inconsistency perpetually threatens to undermine the structure of a given situation. Moreover, because it is pure Being—i.e., existence without predicates—the void carries within itself the possibility of a new world to come. Drawing on Badiou, I contend that the

¹³² Raissiguier (2010) suggests that undocumented migrants who come from privileged backgrounds resent being associated with men and women of lower status within the *sans papiers* movement. For these migrants, being undocumented would constitute a form of downward social mobility. While the members of *Groupe Confiance* do come from a variety of social backgrounds (with members like Pierre and Fatou hailing from families with considerable privilege), class hierarchies are not reproduced within the collective. The persistent focus on a common experience of lack has helped forestall this eventuality.

void of exile, in which dislocated, depersonalized and devalued *sans papiers* are currently being confined, is a site of dis-identification that undermines both the logics of state and capital, allowing for the emergence of a *fundamentally egalitarian* cosmopolitanism of the undocumented. This cosmopolitanism is, on the one hand, reminiscent of that described by Étienne Tassin, in which “[d]islocation and ‘exposure to danger’”—as conditions of migrant life—“are at once that which threatens human beings’ subjective identity and groups’ political stability, and the experience of their continuous re-invention”¹³³ (Tassin 2008: 2-3). On the other hand, this cosmopolitanism echoes Marx’s vision of a world in which exploited workers of all nationalities can unite precisely because they are nothing, and because they have nothing to lose but their chains (Marx 1953). As such, the void’s inconsistency is not merely generative of novel forms of life, it is also the bearer of universality, and hence of radical equality.

In this latter understanding, the particular and the universal are connected via the genericity of the proletariat, or, for our present purposes, the genericity of the undocumented. If humans who have been stripped of all that made them singular beings have indeed been reduced to nothing, then, as Rancière and Badiou write, it is also precisely because they are nothing that they can and must be everything.¹³⁴ And to become everything, they must transform the world that has turned them into nothing. Thus the generic class of overexploited *sans papiers* is revolutionary not by virtue of its specificity as a class, but by virtue of its need to achieve universality in

¹³³ My translation.

¹³⁴ Badiou has frequently observed that the French version of the *Internationale* includes the following phrase: “we are nothing, let us be all” (“*nous ne sommes rien, soyons tout*”).

order to abolish class society. What Marx, Badiou and Rancière are effectively saying, then, is that the emancipation of the generic group of undocumented migrants is also the emancipation of us all.

I would here like to make one last comment on the question of universalism. For many years now, scholars have associated universalism with the expansive ambitions of hegemonic groups, forgetting that, historically, the excluded and exploited have themselves fought domination through universalizing forms of politics. The distinction Étienne Balibar (1993) makes between extensive (or quantitative) and intensive (or qualitative) universalism provides a useful corrective to this view. Balibar describes extensive, hegemonic universalism as one in which the universal is already given, and whose jurisdiction is imposed over the largest possible surface of the earth. Intensive, critical universalism, by contrast, is one in which a particular injustice is given, and the universal is pursued by transforming the world that has produced this injustice. The movement of *sans papiers* evidently corresponds to the second form. For theirs is a universalism that demands the *radical* reconfiguration of a world that produces the void in which they are reduced to abjection. *Sans papiers*' emergence out of the void and onto the political scene must thus be read as a dialectical gesture by which the Mediterranean city's (and the world's) vanishing common can be effectively rebuilt.

4.3.2 *The Refusing Refuse*

Excluded as they are from neoliberal space-time, undocumented migrants can of course simply hope to be individually reintegrated into the realm of recognized humanity. This longing is certainly widespread among Marseille's *sans papiers*, who often believe that their lives on French soil will truly begin once they

secure their first *carte de séjour*. Yet the government of socialist President François Hollande—about whom Miguel had said prior to his being elected: “We’re waiting for him like we would for a god”—has dashed many *sans papiers*’ hopes of finally escaping the void. Not only has it become obvious that there will never be another mass regularization of *sans papiers* in France¹³⁵, but the socialist President’s treatment of undocumented migrants has proved as violent as that of its right-wing predecessor Nicolas Sarkozy.

Realizing that they may never obtain the much sought after documents, more and more *sans papiers* in Marseille are beginning to imagine a way out of the void that does not entail integrating a world that so evidently rejects them. The trajectory of escape may not yet be well-defined; but given *sans papiers*’ positioning outside of space and time, one can only assume that it begins with negating the logics of state and capital that produce the void of exile along with migrant ‘illegality.’ As such, spontaneous resistance at the border, lines of flight, desertion and other autonomous tactics may not suffice. For only by effecting a full rupture in neoliberal space-time can *sans papiers* hope to interrupt the logics of state representation and capitalist valuation that turn them into dirt. In other words, it is only by refusing the world that refuses them that the world’s refuse can put an end to their own abjectionification.

The radical potential of *sans papiers* politics can be illustrated by returning to Pierre’s story with which I opened this chapter. When he was incarcerated in the

¹³⁵ The last mass regularization of *sans papiers* in France occurred under socialist leadership in 1997, when 80 000 undocumented migrants were granted a *carte de séjour* over just a few months.

Arenc center back in 2001, Pierre signalled his refusal of the void by cutting his wrists open and showing that the fantasy of ‘France’ is always already steeped in blood—in his blood, and in the blood of countless Africans who drown each year trying to reach the shores of this imaginary asylum. As he erupted out of the void, Pierre not only refused the violence of the French state; he also signified to its agents that the earth was created for all, and that he felt at home wherever he happened to be. In effect, Pierre negated a world scattered with walls only to better affirm a world common to all humans.

A similar dialectical move is effected each time an undocumented migrant erupts on the political scene, forcefully occupying a space from which he or she has been formally excluded. Rallies and public protests, in particular, provide *sans papiers* with the opportunity to exist in a common world by dissolving the walls that keep them locked within the regime of invisibility/hypervisibility I described in chapter 3. As Jacques Rancière (1995) suggests, the political subjectivation of those who have no-part occurs precisely when these make themselves visible in the political community that refuses to see and hear them. By defying the state as Pierre did, or by saying that ‘There are no strangers on earth’ (one of the key slogans of the *sans papiers* movement in France), *sans papiers* are effectively refusing the sovereign logic that splits humanity between legal subjects and illegal objects.



Figure 4.2: “There Are no Strangers on Earth”
Photo by Jean-Pierre Cavallié (2014)

In fact, claiming that there are no strangers on earth is not only to stress the fabricated nature of borders and nations. It is also to propose the vision of an alternative future, one in which the vanishing common has been restored, and in which all those who have been pushed into the void can find a place where they can be human again. Attaining this alternative future is no easy task for *sans papiers*, however, for the new immigration regime has left them stuck in the time of waiting, which is also a time of social death. Moreover, the case-by-case logic of regularization has helped break the collective will of *sans papiers*. Yet during meetings at *Groupe Confiance*, it became increasingly clear to those who had longed for individual entry into the legitimate political community that they now had to reject the logic of value that immobilized them in space and time. They also found that the devaluation that comes with temporal enclosure could be refused only

through the search for a collective future. In other words, to refuse the void is also to demand that futurity be restored.

One particularly exhilarating moment has left its mark on me. One winter afternoon, during a rally on the main artery of *La Canebière*, Saloua decided to act the part as other members of *Groupe Confiance* were distributing leaflets that presented poignant testimonies of *sans papiers*. Without warning, she grabbed one of the leaflets, waved it in the air, and declared: “I am not *sans papiers*! I have papers! This leaflet is my *carte de séjour*!” She then proceeded to march in the direction of two policemen who were watching the scene, showed them the leaflet, flirted with them a little, and then came back towards us shouting: “I am not afraid anymore! I don’t need no papers!” In what would have otherwise seemed a banal incident, an undocumented woman had teased two agents of the state, asserting her right to be and live wherever she pleased, all the while knowing she risked being arrested simply for being on French soil. Saloua, who first came to *Groupe Confiance* saying she was a living dead, had ceased to wait for her *carte de séjour* and become part of the living again.

Negating the politico-economic logic that produces dislocation, depersonalization and devaluation at the site of the void, while also affirming the possibility of a radically other world, is, I argue, the dialectical hallmark of genericity. For if those who have been reduced to nothing are to be everything, then a thorough transformation of the world that is given to them must necessarily be effected. This means that the generic—as existence stripped of all predicates—can only be oriented towards the future. In effect, the generic is that which generates: It is, in the words of Rémy Bac (2009), ‘that which lies before us.’ It can produce

something radically new precisely because it is unrepresentable, uncountable, and unfixable. In Badiouian terms (1988), the generic can break with *that which is* because it lies on the edge of the void.

In short, ‘*sans papiers*’ is not simply the name of lack. It is also the name of a potentially revolutionary figure. Pierre is a generic subject who is also the bearer of universality. Saloua carries within herself the possibility of a new world-to-come.

4.3.3 *Beyond Papers, Beyond Value, Towards Radical Equality*



**Figure 4.3: *Sans Papiers’ May Day:*
“*With or Without Papers, We Are all Workers!*”
Photo by Jean-Pierre Cavallié (2014)**

It has often been remarked that the power of the *sans papiers* workers’ strike lies in its linking citizenship to where one lives and works - as the slogan “*On bosse ici! On vit ici! On reste ici!*” (“We work here! We live here! We stay here!”) effectively captures. What I would like to suggest now is that the political implications of the *sans papiers* movement for our common future are far more

important than this. The modes of political subjectivation of *sans papiers* workers effectively rely on the Badiouian axiom that “there is only one world” (Badiou 2007). By asserting that those who are separated by arbitrary nationality laws are in fact always already connected through the (im)materiality of labor, *sans papiers* workers are demanding to live in a world without borders, and, consequently, without papers.

Increasingly, *sans papiers* and their activist allies in France are demanding the outright abolition of borders. They do so of course because the right to free circulation should be accessible to all. But they also do so because there is a growing awareness that the reinforcement of borders is not protecting the labor rights of anyone, but is contributing rather to the dismantling of the rights of all workers (including French ones) and to the degradation of their working conditions, and this by creating a race to the bottom in the flexible underground. This race to the bottom is terrifying to the most vulnerable French men and women, who sense that they risk being sucked into the void along with *sans papiers*. Far-right organizations have instrumentalized these legitimate fears, blaming undocumented migrants for this dire situation, as opposed to capitalism and its logic of accumulation that are gradually destroying the common world. The *sans papiers* movement seems especially well positioned to counter such reactionary tendencies at work in French society.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the term *sans papiers* has come to stand in for all those who live in conditions of extreme precarity in France. For the degraded lives of undocumented migrants may well prefigure the future of Europeans themselves. If *sans papiers* are at the vanguard of neoliberal experimentation with labor and surveillance practices, then they are also, through their political

mobilizations, at the vanguard of a new world-to-come. And this world that they are hoping to build is one in which there will be no foreigners, no hierarchies, no off-places and no void. It is also a world in which the logic of value itself will have to be superseded. Here is an example of how *sans papiers*' emergence on the political scene already begins to subvert capital's logic of value.

One summer evening, after a particularly intense political debate at *La Cimade*, the members of *Groupe Confiance* and I went to see an art exhibition on the theme of South African Apartheid. Presented as part of the *Marseille 2013* cultural events, the exhibition was held in one the new art galleries of *Le Panier*, itself one of the fastest-gentrifying neighborhoods of Marseille. Though the South African artist's political commitment was unquestionable,¹³⁶ the exhibition of his artwork for elite consumption inevitably participated in the commodification of history that has become the hallmark of global cities—as I showed in chapter 2. Here, the commodification of apartheid history enabled the bourgeois public to maintain a comfortable distance from a racist regime construed as a thing of the past. As such, the effective apartheid currently underway at Europe's southern and eastern borders could remain unspoken. In this context, the eruption of fifteen, mostly African *sans papiers* on the scene proved nothing short of remarkable.

As we entered the art gallery, all eyes turned to the humbly dressed men and women that were accompanying me. No one was openly rude, but a certain discomfort could be felt in the air. My *sans papiers* friends pretended not to notice, however, and went about exploring the exhibition room. Some, like Ahmed and Miguel, started a conversation with the most receptive members of the public,

¹³⁶ As was that of my friend who helped organize the exhibition.

commenting on the artworks they saw, and alluding to their own segregated existence. Overall, the fifteen *sans papiers* occupied the space of the art gallery as equals, as though they, too, were valuable art critics. They all seemed happy to escape, even if only momentarily, the void of exile and the devaluation that came with it. The evening was, by all accounts, a great success.

As long as the desolate existence of *sans papiers* remains hidden from the view of those who can afford the benefits of space-time compression, the society of the spectacle can continue to turn the past and the future into the eternal present of postmodernity. Yet on that day at the art gallery, the appearance of fifteen *sans papiers* on the bourgeois arts scene shattered the dream of the commodity-form, waking the proper-tied classes from their consumptive slumber. In the moment they turned themselves into visible and audible political subjects, these undocumented migrants interrupted the logic of value accumulation that rests on their incessant devaluation, while also signifying that apartheid is not a relic of the past, but a violence of our common present. The eruption of these generic beings as the gap in the present order rendered the latter ontologically incomplete, thereby exploding the self-enclosure of the existing world. In effect, in the moment they refused to remain stuck in the time of waiting, *sans papiers* reignited not only their own future, but also that of all those who are trapped in the eternal present of postmodernity. By waking us from our consumption dreams, they opened up the possibility of imagining a future beyond value.

Lastly, I mentioned earlier that, as they undergo dis-identification (and hence difference erasure), *sans papiers* find that they are radically equal to each other. This radical equality, I want to insist here, is an effect of their being positioned in the

void and must thus be distinguished from the notion of equality that has provided the foundation for political liberalism. While the first is inherently revolutionary, the second amounts to the logic of equivalence that is central to capitalism.¹³⁷ Post-structuralists who have critiqued the concept of equality forget that what they are critiquing is in fact the logic of equivalence that prevails on the market.

What I am arguing here is that, at a time when the dominated are increasingly fragmented, pit against one another in the flexible underground, *sans papiers* who have been dislocated, depersonalized, devalued—and hence disidentified—have nothing to propose but the radical equality that comes with nakedness. Thus they can show the way to universal equality. In fact, in the very moment that they appear onto the political scene, these formerly invisible and inaudible subjects not only redistribute what Rancière (1995) refers to as ‘the order of the sensible’, but also participate in the construction of a new, universalizing political community. As such, they open up a future previously closed to them, one which ruptures the space-time of neoliberal postmodernity.

The radical potential of the *sans papiers* movement, then, lies precisely in the fact that it originates in the void of exile. For it is in the void, where all modalities of difference lose their consistency, and where the pure equality of dislocated, depersonalized, and devalued humans is laid bare, that a political event can occur. The event, as Badiou claims, is always other-than-Being. Speaking as they do from a place of silence and invisibility, as nameless subjects who have been evicted from the ambit of ‘living humanity’ while being simultaneously exploited by

¹³⁷ Badiou makes this distinction between equality and equivalence in his book on Saint-Paul (1997).

it, *sans papiers* cannot but beckon us to a radically Other world. Yet the alterity to be engaged with here is not synonymous with ‘incommensurable cultural difference.’ It refers rather to the radical otherness of the borderless and egalitarian world that *sans papiers* are enjoining us to build. By re-orienting our gaze from particular experiences of abjection and exile to the larger horizon of radical equality, the *sans papiers* movement points to a futurity that is universal in scope.

4.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the politics of *sans papiers* that have developed in Marseille out of undocumented migrants’ increased immobilization in space and time. I began with documenting how a group of *sans papiers*—the *Groupe Confiance* collective at *La Cimade*—have come together in recent years around a shared experience of dislocation, depersonalization and devaluation in the void of exile. I then noted that the lack of a legal status has been setting *sans papiers* apart from documented migrants in the Mediterranean city. This has led me to argue that the neoliberal reorganization of labor and the reconfiguration of (supra)national borders have together prompted the formation of a generic class of undocumented workers in Marseille and, by extension, elsewhere in Europe.

In turn, I explored how the political actions developed by *sans papiers* originate in their unique condition as generic—i.e., dis-identified—subjects. I showed that while the *sans papiers* movement includes migrants hailing from highly diverse national, social and religious backgrounds, it does not appeal to any identity in particular. It organizes rather around the fact of having and being nothing, as well as around the belief in the possibility of a radical equality to come. In view of this, I

argued, *sans papiers* must necessarily engage in dialectical and universalizing forms of politics if they want to escape from the void of exile.

No longer content with hiding and waiting for documents that may eventually endow their existence with state-sanctioned value, Marseille's *sans papiers* have begun to engage in political actions by which they forcefully enter the political community that refuses to see and hear them. Through such modes of political subjectivation, I contend, they are effecting a rupture in the naturalized space-time of the neoliberal security state. For in the moment they erupt on the political scene, *sans papiers* not only (if momentarily) dissolve the walls that keep them locked within a regime of invisibility/hyperinvisibility; they also interrupt the logic of value circulation and accumulation that sustains the enclosure of the spatio-temporal common.

Most importantly, through their political practices, *sans papiers* are gradually rebuilding the common that has been vanishing at the border of the (supra)nation. This new common is, of necessity, one that supersedes the logics of state representation and capitalist valuation that have produced the void of exile along with migrant 'illegality.' By engaging with each other and with the humanity that excludes them through a thoroughly cosmopolitan and future-oriented practice, nameless and uprooted *sans papiers* are, in effect, at the vanguard of an egalitarian world-to-come.

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